

**UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**White Atlantics: The Imagination of Transatlantic Whiteness in Film**

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**ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of the project is to investigate the politics of hegemonic white Atlantics in film. Case studies were selected as paradigmatic of specific historical moments in the development of white Atlanticist discourses. The focus of analysis in each case was the representation of racialised whiteness in a context of its gradual decentring and a concomitant emergence of transnational identities in a post-national discursive paradigm. The argument presented here is that the white Atlantic is a political construct variously both resisted and produced in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic paradigms of racialised transatlantic whiteness. As such it is capable of mutation and inflection as it is deployed in the mobilisation of power.

A range of textual analysis techniques and tools, including semiotics, genre and narrative analysis, were applied to the selected case studies. The methodology employed was derived from post-structuralist accounts of discourse as both constitutive and productive of identities, in which film may be understood as part of the cultural repertoire of signifiers of 'what is on the mind' of the producers and readers of white Atlanticist discourse.

The project is limited by its substantive scope and methodological approach. Substantively, its scope is limited to film. Interrogation of other expressive forms would enlarge the scope to readings. The methodology also leads to an emphasis on a reading of the text, while the audience is assumed. An ethnographic methodology may offer

different results. Most significantly, the project is limited by its case study scope. A fuller interpretation of the development of the white Atlantic in film requires a considerably more substantive transatlantic genealogy to interrogate its polyvalence in different times and locations.

The project extends the academic study of racialised whiteness which has mainly been focused within national boundaries. It also extends the contemporary development of work on transatlantic whiteness of which the substantive research has been mainly of a historical nature. In extending the range of research in these ways, the project identifies and offers a reading of contemporary white Atlanticist discourses and their development. The case study readings suggest that, in the context of the progressive decentring of whiteness, polyvalent discourses of racialised transatlantic whiteness have emerged, articulated, in particular, via available tropes of romance and masculinity.

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## Introduction

This project interrogates the politics of white Atlantics in film. It deploys the construct of an imperialist 'white Atlantic' as an heuristic device to explore the politics of polyvalent transatlantic discourses in film. Film case studies are analysed for their discursive content, and are grouped in terms of their Atlanticist positioning.

The first chapter is concerned with 'Themes and Issues' and departs from the emergence of two areas of study in the academy: transatlanticism, particularly in the wake of Gilroy's work, and whiteness studies. It provides an overview of scholarly debates linked to these discursive constructs. It goes on to consider connections between them in historical and contemporary contexts, specifically their historical contingency and mobilisation by competing interest groups. It also explains the terms 'default identity' and 'racialised whiteness' as they are used in the project to position identities relationally and in discourse. The chapter uses the construct 'white Atlantic' as an heuristic device to explore and problematise hegemonic uses of transatlantic whitenesses. It includes a genealogy of cinematic white and Jewish Atlantics to contextualise the case studies which follow.

The Methodology chapter addresses the question of why films are the chosen medium to examine. It argues for the nature of film as a medium which produces racial identity as apparently self-evident, with concomitant implications for representations of identities. It critically examines the reliability and validity of textual analysis as a method and considers to what extent it can be claimed that film operates as discursive practice.

The first case study chapter, 'We'll Always Have Paris', uses the construct of a Jewish Atlantic to explore the politics of Allen's 1970s romances. The films are discussed in terms of their mobilisation of a counter hegemonic discourse in opposition to a post-World War Two rightward shift in US culture and politics. This theme is linked to Allen's problematising of ethnic absolutism and critiquing the privileging of whiteness. The chapter considers how successful Allen is in achieving these ends, and whether his films finally privilege his version of Jewish masculinity as the default identity.

The second content chapter, 'White Atlantic Romance', explores the politics of white Atlanticist discourses in the sub-genre of the London transatlantic romantic-comedies of the last two decades. The genealogy of the genre is traced back to Allen's 1970s romances, in a further exploration of the relation of white and Jewish Atlantics. The chapter explores the context of the sub-genre's emergence and argues that the Curtis films expressed a political re-orientation of British white Atlanticist discourse in the Blair-Clinton era. It offers a close reading of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, UK, 1994) to argue that on the one hand it exploits the possibilities offered by polysemic racialised and queer constructions of white Atlantics; while on the other it privileges white, bourgeois, English masculinity, as the default, Atlanticist identity. The discussion argues that by the turn of the century, the films express a marginalisation of the racialising and queering of white Atlanticist discourses, as evidenced by the later development of the transatlantic, white, heterosexual rom-com as a sub-genre of romantic comedy. At the same time, the genre expresses rifts in the Special Relationship after the election of G.W. Bush. The chapter concludes with a summary tracing the development of the genre up to and including *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, UK, 2003).

The final content chapter 'Post- 9/11 Anxieties' examines three case studies in the context of a shift in European attitudes to America in the Post-9/11 era. It argues that intertextual relays of the white Atlantic romance narrative and of narratives of white masculine crisis are deployed in the service of articulating differently inflected discourses of Atlanticist renewal in each of the film examples. The chapter suggests there is a continuity of themes pre- and post- 9/11.



## Themes and Issues

The notion of a white Atlantic is a contested and contradictory one, suggestive of both fixity and liminality, of both dislocation and relocation. Interrogation of its content, borders and boundaries has emerged in response to recent reorientations in ways of seeing and narrating racial identities. Whether it is possible to identify a real or metaphoric white Atlantic is a question that has been posed since the development of two distinct, but historically not unrelated, discursive fields in the academy: the deployment of post-national(ist) cultural paradigms in the wake of Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) and, contemporaneously with Gilroy's work on the black Atlantic, work on white identities and constructions of whiteness. Whether there can be identified a multiplicity of polyvalent Atlantics is a question which arises out of this work. One thread of enquiry has developed from suggestive paragraphs in *The Black Atlantic* and from Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (1992) concerning the Jewish diaspora and its relation to the black Atlantic. The idea that there is a Jewish Atlantic, and a consideration of its relation to whiteness and blackness, has emerged, complicating further the discursive field of Atlanticist paradigms. Why interrogation of these Atlanticist discourses have emerged in recent years, and what further questions they raise are questions to be addressed in this opening chapter.

The overall focus of the study is an interrogation of the politics of white Atlantic discourses in selected contemporary film case studies. Contemporary, in this context, refers to the 1970s and afterwards. The case studies discussed in close readings range from the 1970s through to the last decade. However, the introductory chapter will include a contextualising genealogy which will consider selected sound films from before that era. In

each of the case studies there will be an exploration of the discursive deployment of whiteness and white Atlanticist paradigms. The close readings will be used to demonstrate three main arguments. The first of these is that while both whiteness and white Atlantics are never fixed, but always immanent, or becoming, their deployment in film is frequently contextually strategic and contingent. The second is that though their deployment of Africanism and transatlantic triangulation are ongoing strategies, the specific configuration of these elements is mutable and shifting, locating specific strategies of whiteness in political context. The third is that the contemporary claiming or refusing of white Atlanticist paradigms constitute particular, alternative, strategies for the recuperation of whiteness in a contemporary context of its perceived progressive decentring. Such a recuperation would suggest a restoration of whiteness to a position as the default identity. The latter term is used to mean that identity which is racially unmarked and normalised. As will be suggested in the discussion which follows, one of the privileging features of whiteness has been its ability to appear unraced, and therefore unmarked. In contrast, the term racialised whiteness is used to refer to a white identity which is racially marked, discursively exposing the operation of raced categories.

The case studies will be set out in the chapters that follow. Before that, a contextualising discussion needs to be set out in this chapter. This argument will draw on frameworks developed by scholars in the overlapping discursive fields of post-national (ist) and whiteness studies to suggest that the historical claiming or refusal of white subject positions by groups and individuals, either national (ist) or Atlanticist, has been uneven, contested and internally differentiated, depending on strategic interests. It will be argued that whiteness, rather than being a monolithic entity has in different locations and at different times been claimed or disavowed, its privileges continually contested and negotiated. It will be suggested that political whiteness and political blackness are

distinctly modern identities of transatlantic origin, and it will examine the idea that there is now a need for a critical white Atlantic paradigm. This will be considered via critical explorations of competing Atlanticist discourses and academic debates about whiteness, followed by an examination of selected historical case studies.

### **Perspectives on White, Black, and Jewish Atlantics**

The recent turn to whiteness as an established field of study in the academy has produced both insights and anxieties which will be explored shortly. However, conversations about whiteness have, by and large, constructed discrete whitenesses operating within the borders of nation-states. Expressing frustration with this narrow framing of debates, Ware and Back (2002) have suggested a transnational paradigm of whiteness is needed. Their work, which takes a specifically transatlantic focus, is one of a number of discourses differentially positioned in relation to the idea of a white Atlantic, which, as has been noted, emerged in response to Gilroy's construction of a black Atlantic. Before discussing these polyvalent and competing responses to intertwined discourses of white identity and post-national narratives of race and ethnicity it is useful to contextualise the idea of a white Atlantic by first returning to Gilroy and his argument for abandoning the nation-state as a unit of analysis.

Gilroy argues that national paradigms are inadequate to grasp the migratory and syncretic hybridity of cultures and identities. In *The Black Atlantic* Gilroy makes this case specifically in respect of black cultures, challenging what he sees as the national (ist) paradigms of cultural studies as presented in British and American academies. Gilroy charges the discursive practice of British, or more accurately, English, cultural studies with the reinvention of an imagined (white) community erased of diasporic and hybrid elements. He charges the discourses of African-American studies with an elitist Afrocentric

masquerading as intellectual vanguardism, displaying, 'incomprehending disappointment with the actual cultural choices and patterns of the mass of black people',<sup>1</sup> and in which notions of authentic blackness have pervaded the literature and consciousness of black writing and popular culture. In Afrocentric discourse, he argues, black history and cultural achievement is frozen before the moment of transatlantic slavery, understood as an aberration producing little of cultural value. Similar sentiments are expressed by Toni Morrison who notes a tendency in African-American studies towards totalising discourses in which the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms is exchanged for a new dominance of Afrocentrism; like Gilroy, she rejects this tendency.<sup>2</sup>

In place of exclusive and bordered nationalisms, Gilroy offers a transatlantic paradigm, suggesting that cultural historians take the Atlantic as their object of study to allow transnational and intercultural perspectives. The Atlantic, he argues, is an appropriate spatial referent for the locus of black cultures because it has a specifically modern and relevant history, that of transatlantic slavery and its cultural products, evaded and erased not only by the paradigm of Afrocentric recuperation, but also by the strategic rhetoric of nationalist cultures. Gilroy's notion of a re-imagined community draws on the influential work of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1991). Anderson argued for the fictive nature of national identity, in which dispersed and diverse individuals are constructed as being part of a community with a shared past, and significantly, a shared future. Traditions, real or invented, are invoked to suggest ties of shared lineage, language and ethnicity, and, so it follows, kinship. Gilroy's designation of the black Atlantic as 'black' is political and furthers his aim to 'have blacks perceived as agents'<sup>3</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gilroy (1991), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London, Verso: 32

<sup>2</sup> Toni Morrison (1992), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, Mass and London England

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gilroy, op.cit: 6

the making of modernity, a process in which, he argues, black Atlantic cultures are central:

The concentrated intensity of the slave experience is something that marked out blacks as the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later.<sup>4</sup>

Experiences of dislocation and loss are among the defining features of both slavery and modernity, he suggests. The initial means of disseminating the imaginary nation was, Anderson suggested, the printed mass media. Gilroy's black Atlantic coheres via the transatlantic circulation of music, the printed narratives of former slaves and the writing of black radicals. His provocative project is to claim the cultural legacy of slavery as a richly productive one; the lived experience of loss and terror produces a critical sensibility which is expressed in art. A major theme is the black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity, its expressive cultures opposing the Enlightenment binarism which separates art and life, and instead emphasising the continuity of these two phenomena, predominantly in the forms of music and dance; other expressive cultures being denied to the mass of slaves under the institution of slavery. In exploring this idea, Gilroy opens a suggestive discussion comparing the experiences of blacks and Jews in modernity, in which both may be said to have gained the 'advantages of marginality as a hermeneutic standpoint'.<sup>5</sup> The relation of Jews and blacks to modernity and to each other are matters which will be returned to in a discussion in this chapter of what Carol Smith has termed the 'Jewish Atlantic'.<sup>6</sup> However, the next section will examine the deployment of blackness in *The Black Atlantic*.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilroy, op.cit: 221

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, ibid: 213

<sup>6</sup> Carol R. Smith (2001), 'The Jewish Atlantic: The Development of Blackness in Saul Bellow', *The Saul Bellow Journal*, Volumes 16-17: 253-280

Crucial questions arise as to what constitutes blackness in the black Atlantic and to how blackness is deployed strategically in *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy emphasises the need to depart from essentialist constructions of blackness declaring his methodology to be one of anti-essentialist essentialism. This construct seems to contain an irreconcilable contradiction and defies straightforward definition. However, it appears to be a strategy of categorical resistance: evading as much as it clarifies; oscillating between essentialism and constructivism. It is, arguably, symptomatic of the contradictions involved in moving beyond an essentialist trope of blackness whilst working to reveal the agency of blacks in the modern world. Gilroy never defines his use of blackness in a direct way, but the tendency of his argument is that the commonality of blackness in the black Atlantic lies in the shared history of the racial terror of slavery and beyond, and in the cultural products it produced.

Given Gilroy's aim to locate a black Atlantic counterculture at the heart of modernity it is significant that he chose not to provide a detailed discussion of the life and work of James Baldwin, as he does for Du Bois and Richard Wright. One reviewer has remarked that the gap is a glaring one;<sup>7</sup> given Baldwin's status as a major writer, and given his expatriate residence in France, he would seem to qualify as a black Atlantic figure. Post-Gilroy, Baldwin has been incorporated into an emerging black Atlantic literary canon, whereas in *The Black Atlantic* he features only in passing. Suggesting Baldwin's inclusion on the basis of his European migration is perhaps to make a very literal interpretation of the black Atlantic paradigm. Rather, it is Baldwin's liminality that would seem to make him precisely the kind of black Atlantic countercultural figure that a counterculture of modernity would embrace. In his writing and in his life he enacted racial and sexual border crossings:

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<sup>7</sup> Dwight A. McBride (1999), *James Baldwin Now*, New York and London, New York University Press: 2

It is finally possible to understand Baldwin's vision of and for humanity in its complexity, locating him not as an exclusively gay, black, expatriate, activist or the like but as an intricately negotiated amalgam of all of those things.<sup>8</sup>

McBride suggests that Baldwin defies easy categorisation, moving between subject positions, performing blackness as a civil rights activist or effecting race change as the writer of *Giovanni's Room*, for example. That Gilroy chose not to explore the destabilising potential of Baldwin's work is suggestive of the black Atlantic as substituting the policed boundaries of national (ist) cultures with an equally bounded post-national paradigm, into which Baldwin's particular transgressive hybridity does not fit. While Baldwin has since been recuperated as a black Atlantic figure, he might as readily be viewed as a gay Atlantic figure, in the light of his literary preoccupation with sexual identity; though further research is needed to investigate this claim. Gilroy claims Baldwin, by inclusion, as a black Atlantic figure, but demotes him in the, then new, black Atlantic canon, by summary treatment. In *The Black Atlantic*, only some forms of hybridity and creolisation are included, and Gilroy finally constructs blackness as a stable and fixed category, a necessary strategy, perhaps, in his project to construct a narrative of black agency, but problematical for a project to transcend racial binarisms.

The paradigm changing impact of *The Black Atlantic* is difficult to overestimate. It has led not only to the academic proliferation of work taking the black Atlantic as an exploratory spatial referent, but also to questions concerning whether there is a white Atlantic, a Jewish or gay Atlantic, or in fact a complex matrix of Atlantic paradigms. In *Circling Dixie*, Helen Taylor (2001) assumes a hybridised Atlantic. In her richly detailed 'circum-lantic' journey she traces twentieth century interwoven threads in the transatlantic circulation and politics of popular texts such as Alex Haley's *Roots* (US, 1976) and *Gone With the Wind*

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<sup>8</sup> Dwight A. McBride, op.cit.: 2

(Mitchell, 1936). In tracing their connections and tensions, she suggests a complex matrix of discursive repertoires of black and white Atlantics in play. That there are political tensions connected with constructions of white and black Atlantics is acknowledged. However, the troubling designation of the terms black and white remains unproblematised and the relationship between these Atlantics remains unexamined. In Taylor's work, there is an optimistic sense that the aim of Gilroy and Morrison, to reshape modernity to admit the centrality of blackness, has now been accomplished. However, Taylor's phrase, 'the black *Gone With the Wind*', though it sets up an equivalence, restates GWTW as the *urtext*. The texts chosen by Taylor refuse hybridity and so black and white Atlantics remain sealed off and segregated.

Andrew Blake suggests that there *is* a 'white Atlantic' but it is creolised and hybridised. For example, the culture of modern Britain, he argues, has been changed irrevocably by the impact of black American culture. There is, in Blake's Atlantic constructions, an implicit assumption of blackness as coming to (white) Britain from America; that it is a previously white Britain which has been creolised by the black Atlantic, lending weight to Gilroy's opening complaint in *The Black Atlantic* that black and European identities are constructed as mutually exclusive. However, Blake (1996)<sup>9</sup> goes on to qualify and problematise the nature of transatlantic identities. He suggests that it is the privileging of visual cultures over aural cultures which leads to a mistaken perception of the 'white Atlantic' as essentially white in content. If we *listen* to Britain, he suggests, we will hear a hybrid soundtrack; a more authentic version of Britain. By the term authentic, Blake seems to mean a version which approaches some measure of verisimilitude. In relation to this project, what is interesting about Blake's comments is his suggestion that visual cultures can more readily be designated white Atlantics, regardless of their verisimilitude. This idea

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Blake (1996), 'Listen to Britain: Music, Advertising and Postmodern Culture', in M. Nava, A. Blake, I. MacRury, and B. Richards, (eds), *Buy This Book: Advertising and Consumption Since the 1950s*, Routledge, London: 224-38



is a central one in the further development of this study and this theme and the troubling issue of white ventriloquism which Blake's analysis also raises will be returned to. As previously suggested, the specific call for a transnational paradigm of whiteness is made by Vron Ware and Les Back. As they claim, the new writing on whiteness has been predominantly a North American affair, with some exceptions. However, they suggest that:

Like Moby Dick roaming the oceans, the idea of white supremacy is not confined by national, cultural or political boundaries.<sup>10</sup>

They go on to argue that a transatlantic paradigm is needed as part of an ongoing transatlantic collaboration to smash white supremacism. Their metaphor of a leviathan of 'awesome' whiteness possessed of inevitable momentum suggests a view of whiteness as monolithic. What is needed, they argue, is an investigation beyond the surface to explore the complex internal structures of whiteness. This is not, however, the focus of subsequent chapters. Rather the case studies which follow are concerned with historical moments of hybridity, providing instances of the blurring of racial boundaries. This focus accords with their stated aims of working towards the end of whiteness and the transcendence of resilient racial identities. However, it does not address the issues they raise in respect of the structures of whiteness and the call for a transatlantic paradigm of whiteness. This shifting positionality is perhaps reflective of two specific concerns they raise about whiteness studies in the academy. Firstly, whiteness studies, they suggest, began from radical and potentially subversive origins. Now, they argue, but for a few honourable exceptions, such as David Roediger and Ruth Frankenberg, it has become a 'bandwagon' for writers of all disciplines to explore their particular take on it. Secondly, there is a suggestion that the 'new' writing by whites problematising whiteness largely owes its insights to earlier work by black writers such as Du Bois. This is a criticism which

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<sup>10</sup> Vron Ware and Les Back (2002), *Out of Whiteness: Colour, Politics and Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 3

needs to be addressed, as it suggests that the recent work on whiteness is a further example of whites appropriating the work of blacks, and is one which will be returned to shortly; firstly in a discussion of Toni Morrison's exploration of whiteness and the literary imagination, and secondly in Favor's (1999) account of key writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Finally, Ware and Back suggest that the recent turn to whiteness by white scholars is tainted by the suspicion of a narcissistic recentring of whiteness. This is an idea explored at length in the literature on whiteness, and one which will also be discussed later in this chapter. There are two comments that need to be made at this point in respect of the concerns of Ware and Back. The first is that their methodology reflects an approach to whiteness studies, analogous to their perception of whiteness, as a homogeneous field:

Given the proliferation of this work [on whiteness], and the increasing difficulty of tracking its every direction, we intend to take issue with the field as a whole, without claiming to do justice to the key players.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to see how this frame of analysis supports either the call for a critical paradigm of transatlantic whiteness or an investigation of the complex structures of whiteness. The second, related point, is that both whiteness and whiteness studies are contested discursive fields, as it is the intention to illustrate in this chapter. If, as Ware and Back suggest, the discursive power of whiteness is a transnational phenomenon that needs to be addressed then analysis of some of its specific forms and mediations is essential in exposing its rhetorics. While this project shares the aims of working towards the end of whiteness, and transcending resilient racial identities, it is positioned differently from the work of Ware and Back in relation to both whiteness and whiteness studies. In this study, whiteness, and its deployment in transnational discourse is not assumed to be monolithic, and 'out there' roaming the seas like a great white whale, but rather polyvalent, always in the process of construction and open to strategic and opportunistic deployment. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Vron Ware and Les Back, op.cit: 21

intended to include case studies to support this position. In relation to whiteness studies, this study is also positioned differently as will become apparent in the discussion of work on whiteness which follows.

The discussion so far suggests that the idea of the white Atlantic is neither specifically delineated nor theorised, though its existence is cautiously suggested, and hedged in caveats, by Blake. Taylor assumes a hybrid Atlantic based on the transatlantic circulation of both 'white' and 'black' popular texts. She uses the terms black and white Atlantics to delineate the routes followed by these products in a complex matrix of black and white Atlantics continually in play. However, she does not problematise the designations black and white, nor does she theorise their relation to each other. Ware and Back are positioned in a contradictory relation to the idea of a white Atlantic. On the one hand they call for a critical paradigm of transatlantic whiteness, while on the other they are suspicious of the new work on whiteness that, arguably, would inform such a project. Gilroy's black Atlantic paradigm, though not directly concerned with the notion of a white Atlantic, demonstrates the way in which identities are strategically produced and deployed in discourse.

Gilroy's black Atlantic, and Ware's and Back's white Atlantic appear to rest on constructions of bounded post-national re-imagined communities. There is, in their accounts, an assumption of consensual cohesion among the respective members of these discrete communities; an assumption arguably derived from Anderson's argument that communities are composed of dispersed and diverse individuals, who are imagined, as suggested earlier, as having a shared past and a shared future. Language, and a concept

of heritage, according to Hall, are two of the key bonds in suggesting unity.<sup>12</sup> The creation of heritage involves the conservation of works and artefacts which are assigned value in relation to the past and an unfolding national narrative, he suggests. It is not difficult to see how these constructs may be as readily applied to transnational and diasporic imagined communities as they have been to nations. However, as with nations, the complexities of transatlantic, diasporic, narratives of racial identities may involve contradictions and tensions; rather than representing 'bounded, whole and authentic'<sup>13</sup> identities, nations rest on oppositions and tensions between unity and disunity, between home and homelessness; such oppositions and tensions may also be applied to transatlantic diasporic communities.

Morrison's account of whiteness and Africanist presence in American literary imagination rests on the assumption of an Atlantic of opposing and conflictual triangulations, and her work provides an alternative route to conceptualising white Atlantic paradigms from that of Ware and Back. Morrison attempts to move beyond the immediate post-civil rights discourses of race which focused on recuperation and recovery rhetorics of the marginalised Other. *Playing in the Dark* proposes a return to questions repressed in the 'old' [post-civil rights] problematics and debates, and expressed in Richard Wright's 1940s observation that there is not a race problem in the US, only a white problem.<sup>14</sup>

Morrison makes a case that American identity was forged in such a way that, in America, American means white. She dates this invention of American whiteness in the nineteenth century. However, as will be discussed shortly, there is considerable debate over just

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall (2002), 'Whose Heritage ? Un-settling 'The Heritage'', Re-imagining the Post-Nation', in Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, & Ziauddin Sardar (eds), *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture and Theory*, London and New York, Third Text: 72-85

<sup>13</sup> David Morley & Kevin Robins (1995), *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, London, Routledge: 103

<sup>14</sup> Karyn D. McKinney (2005), *Being White: Stories of Race and Racism*, New York, Routledge: 248

when the invention of whiteness, and particularly its positioning as the default American identity, occurred. Though the work to uncover this history has begun, as will be shown, further research is needed to trace the continuities and discontinuities between earlier constructions of whiteness, for example in the revolutionary period, and later constructions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, Morrison makes a compelling case for the renewal of a discursively powerful American whiteness in the nineteenth century. She argues that the 'new white man' was constructed in a symbiotic tension with a constructed Africanist presence. However her argument assumes a transatlantic triangulation in which the new American identity was also shaped in opposition to a European Old World shadow, an idea to be considered shortly. Morrison foregrounds the ways in which black people and tropes of blackness have been used as signifying markers in the work of white canonical authors of American literature. This concern grew out of her reading of Marie Cardinal's autobiographical account of her madness and recovery. The moment Cardinal realised 'she was in trouble' came during a Louis Armstrong concert when she felt she would die, fleeing from the sound of Louis's playing, a 'sound whose path was almost painful'. So began Morrison's exploration of the meanings attached to blackness in the white American literary imagination. She notes sardonically:

The principal reason these matters loom large for me is that I do not have quite the same access to these traditionally useful constructs of blackness. Neither blackness, nor 'people of color' stimulates in me notions of excessive limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread.<sup>15</sup>

In a number of canonical works she explores the significance of an Africanist presence. She rejects the notion that black characters are marginal figures in these works, their presence required simply to supply additional verisimilitude. Noting the writerly choices and selective use of language which writing involves she identifies the allegorical and

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<sup>15</sup> Toni Morrison (1992), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, Mass and London England: x

metaphorical work that an Africanist presence performs in the articulation of whiteness in the nineteenth century American literary canon. She locates the emergence of American-Africanism, or the Africanist literary presence, in the desire on the part of the new Americans to establish an identity which was to be different from, and intellectually and culturally independent of, the Old World:

What seemed to be on the mind of the literature of the United States was the self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the American as a new white man.<sup>16</sup>

The signifiers which gave shape to the new white man: autonomy, authority, newness, difference and power, Morrison argues, could only have meaning because they were constructed in sharp relief against a present 'bound and unfree black population'. The slave population, she suggests, was available as a surrogate for meditations on abstract concepts of human freedom, its lure and elusiveness, and on that which was repressed in the self-conscious construction of the new white man; the concrete terror of 'European outcasts', their dread of failure, of powerlessness, of Nature without limits, of natal loneliness and of sin. As Richard Dyer and Morrison have noted, projection of sexuality onto 'dark races' has been a means for whites of both representing and disavowing their own desires. The Africanist presence in the white Romantic literature of the New World was made to stand in for all of that part of human experience, desire and fear which could not be spoken about. That the dominant form of this literary expression was the romance is significant, suggests Morrison:

Above all... it offered... terror's most significant, overweening ingredient: darkness, with all the connotative value it awakened.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Toni Morrison, *op.cit.*: 39

<sup>17</sup> Toni Morrison, *op.cit.*: 37

American romanticism allowed the playing out of both the fantasy and terror of freedom via the cipher of blackness.

However, Morrison's project is not only to delineate the contours of the Africanist presence in white imagination; it is also to turn the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject, from the imagined to the imaginer. In this aim she may be seen as developing a critical agenda for the emerging field of whiteness studies. The functions of Africanism in the literary imagination are of interest, she argues, because via an examination of the trope of 'blackness' it might be possible to come to an understanding of the nature and cause of literary 'whiteness':

What is it *for*? What parts do the development of whiteness play in the construction of what is loosely described as 'American'? <sup>18</sup>

Morrison's purpose in *Playing in the Dark* is to show how in the nineteenth century literary imagination, the identity 'American', unhyphenated and uncompromised, was constructed as specifically white, male and of European lineage, by opposing it, denotatively and connotatively to its 'fabricated', black, Africanist Other. Particularly significant for the aims of this project is the suggestion in Morrison's thesis that the identity of the 'new white man' is articulated, not only in opposition to constructions of blackness, but also develops out of a contradictory transatlantic nexus. That the new American would be different from the European is a longstanding trope found in Emerson and James, particularly, as well as Morrison. The youthful Henry James recounts a meeting with the ageing Emerson in the Louvre in which James was astonished by Emerson's lack of interest in, indeed rejection of, the art and artefacts of the Old World.<sup>19</sup> James's own orientation to European art and

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<sup>18</sup> Toni Morrison, op.cit.: 9

<sup>19</sup> Rob Davidson (2005), *The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism of Henry James and William Dean Howells*, Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Press

culture was, arguably, reflective of a major generational shift in cosmopolitan American attitudes towards Europe since Emerson's Harvard speech, 'The American Scholar'. Morrison cites Emerson's 'American Scholar' speech as an example of the self-conscious construction of the new man, and the desire to establish difference. While she suggests that the United States was not unique in the construction of Africanism, its counterpart being a European Africanism in colonial literature, as explored by Edward Said,<sup>20</sup> the United States *is* unique in that the condition of black slavery allowed the double-Othering in the projection onto blackness of not-me *and* not-free. Furthermore, it is unique, she argues, in its unwillingness to engage, unlike its European counterparts, in a sustained critique of the racialised discourse of its literary canon. Morrison's position suggests a reading of the transatlantic nexus as conflictual and productive of the concomitant development of Africanism. She is at pains to make clear what the flight from the Old World to the New meant to those who made the journey. It was worth the risk because it offered the chance to escape from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility:

All the Old World offered these immigrants was poverty, prison, social ostracism, and, not infrequently death... In the New World there was the vision of a limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, dissatisfaction, and turmoil left behind.<sup>21</sup>

In juxtaposing these contrasting constructions of the European immigrants' past and future possibilities, Morrison seems to be suggesting that the old identities did not provide suitable materials from which to be 'born again in new clothes'. Instead the 'new raiments of self' were designed against the presence of an unfree and ego-reinforcing black population which allowed the development of the European immigrants' desires for autonomy, independence and power and the measurement of how far they had achieved these things.

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Said (1979), *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage

<sup>21</sup> Toni Morrison, op.cit.: 34



Morrison's account is salient for a number of reasons. She highlights both the self-conscious and unconscious deployment of identity in strategic interests; in this case the construction of American identity as that of a new, white man. In doing so, she develops an explanation of the causes of (American) whiteness as historical and contextual. As Morrison points out, the raw material of the new white man was a product of Old World hegemonic cultural forms. However the construction of the new man necessitated refashioning of the old. It is significant that Morrison, conscious of the deliberateness of writerly choices, has elected to rework a metaphor of costume. While new clothes suggest a changed appearance for the new white man, the new raiments have been fashioned out of the master / slave narrative integral to Enlightenment understandings of reason. The new American identity had to be defined against the enslaved Africanist presence which can be seen as too reminiscent of the old oppressed European self in this binaristic discourse. Morrison's work is suggestive of the fragility and instability of the new identity as the new white Americans redefined themselves as 'not-me' in opposition to blackness and Europeanness. This redefinition involved the erasure and evasion of the contradictions involved in the experience of occupying both poles of the master / slave narrative simultaneously. This evasion, Morrison's account suggests, is the 'cause of whiteness': whiteness, though it appears earlier in Europe, gains its full development as a marked identity in the New World. Morrison's account suggests a transatlantic triangulation in which whiteness emerges and is deployed strategically, and her work is a resource for understanding the white Atlantic as a site of contradictory imperatives, as the simultaneous adoption and rejection of the master / slave narrative of Enlightenment discourses. The moral and metaphysical contortions necessary for new Americans to maintain innocence in the face of slavery result in the pouring of the self contradictory features of the self into romantic fictions of blackness, while:

Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable. Or so our writers seem to say.<sup>22</sup>

Morrison does not directly explain why, uniquely, there has been an unwillingness in the US to engage, in contrast to European counterparts, in a sustained critique of the racialised discourse of its literary heritage. However, her whole account suggests that to do so would destabilise the foundational 'not-me' construction of American whiteness and involve confronting the contradictory reality of the (white) self. Babb's work lends support to the idea of a self-conscious deployment of whiteness at the time of the foundation of the United States. She suggests that while Englishness was the early American hegemonic identity, its displacement by the category 'white' was begun in the revolutionary period. Roediger's account supports the idea of a pre-nineteenth century whiteness, citing evidence of self-conscious whiteness in the writings and legislature of the 'founding fathers'. Crucially, by the terms of the Naturalisation Law of 1790, citizenship was limited to free, white persons. This law was drafted, however, in a context when boundaries of whiteness seemed to be, to whites, unambiguous. Whiteness, Morrison's arguments suggest, was constructed at that time largely in relation to its unfree, black Other. However this begs the question as to why, were black slaves the only case, the law did not simply specify free Americans. Presumably, the law had also to exclude Native Americans. Might this exclusion have been achieved by limiting citizenship to 'European' Americans? Perhaps, but this would not have established that autonomous identity sought by the new white man; indeed, just the opposite. It may be that it was also the intention to exclude black Europeans, however, the work to investigate these matters has yet to be done. Nevertheless, by default of specific historical circumstance, almost, whiteness became the only identity resource available in this 'not-me' triangulation. The

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<sup>22</sup> Toni Morrison, *op.cit.*: 59

moment at which whiteness becomes the marked American identity is also the moment when the radical American impetus to overturn the master / slave narrative is betrayed; its promise continuing to haunt the American cultural landscape. The themes developed by Morrison will be applied in the film case studies which follow. Nevertheless, her method needs to be applied with a cautionary caveat with regard to an ahistorical tendency in her approach. Other accounts, including that of Jacobson (2002), which will be discussed later, suggest that the development of whiteness as the hegemonic American identity has been uneven and claimed or refused at various times in strategic fashion. However, with this caveat foregrounded, this section will conclude with the question of the Jewish Atlantic and its relation to whiteness and blackness.

Carol Smith<sup>23</sup> applies Morrison's method and insights from both Morrison and Gilroy in pursuing threads from both to investigate the construction of a Jewish Atlantic. The term Jewish Atlantic, coined by Smith, is a controversial and politically tendentious one. Morrison's exploration of Africanism has been developed by Smith to examine the uses of signifiers of blackness in the writing of Saul Bellow. The term Jewish Atlantic connotes, in Smith's work, an Atlanticist paradigm in which an Africanist presence is deployed in the literary transformation of Jewishness into Americanness and its metaphorical sign, whiteness. In a close reading of three Saul Bellow works, Smith shows how Bellow erases or displaces signifiers of blackness from the transatlantic narrative and so erases or elides the history of transatlantic slavery. She shows how via Africanist signifying practices, Bellow expresses the contradictions and costs involved in the transformation of Jewish identity into the new white man in a new found land. Michael Rogin's<sup>24</sup> work owes its thematics to Morrison's delineation of Africanism. Rogin examines the role of blackface in a process of turning Europeans into Americans. Rogin begins his discussion with a

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<sup>23</sup> Carol R. Smith (2001), op.cit.:

<sup>24</sup> Michael Rogin (1998), *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press

contextualising historical account detailing a transatlantic history of blackface, beginning he suggests at the English court of Queen Anne, consort of James I. Blackface in the seventeenth century, he suggests, possessed different meanings for the participants than those encoded in later nineteenth century meanings, and different ones yet again for the twentieth century Jewish blackface performers. In a complex argument, to which there is not space to do justice here, Rogin argues that in the twentieth century, blacking up, in a tradition already long established in (white) popular culture, established Jolson, and therefore other Jews as white. In a syncretic interweaving of European, Jewish, popular and high cultural forms, with forms derived from black folk and white popular culture, to produce for example *My Mammy*, Jolson becomes, in blackface, a generic white person, expunged of a particularistic ethnicity; from European Jew to the default (white) American identity.

However, that Jewish identity complicates binaristic raciology is a recurrent theme in writing about Jewishness and its relation to blackness and whiteness. Recent work on Jewishness has emphasised border-crossings. The construct of a border-crossing Jewish identity has both history and currency. Accounts of Jewish subjectivity frequently articulate the diasporic experience as transgressive of modernist binarisms, in language which prefigures Gilroy's articulation of black Atlantic subjectivity. As previously noted, Gilroy spends some time drawing comparisons between Jewish and black diasporic experience. Mark Schechner suggests that to be both Jewish and modern is to be a bridge between two worlds.<sup>25</sup> This view is echoed in Bailey's description of Jewish American culture as poised between ghetto and *shtetl*.<sup>26</sup> According to Melanie Kaye/Kantrovitz, within a

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Schechner (1987), *After the Revolution: Studies in the Jewish American Imagination*, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press

<sup>26</sup> Peter J. Bailey (2001), *The Reluctant Film Art of Woody Allen*, Kentucky, The University Press

contemporary discourse of binaristic raciology, 'Jews complicate things'<sup>27</sup> as Jewishness is variously constructed as both white and non-white. The politics of Jewish Atlanticism will be returned to later in this chapter in a brief account of Atlanticist paradigms in sound films before the 1970s and considered in depth in a case study of three Woody Allen films in the next chapter. However, before going on to consider some specific case studies, the next sections will explore some of the main themes which emerge from a reading of whiteness studies literature.

### **The Content of Whiteness and of Whiteness Studies**

Interviewed in the film, *The Price of the Ticket* (1985) James Baldwin states, 'as long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you', suggesting both the imaginariness and the materiality of whiteness as an identity. It echoes his earlier reflections on whiteness in a short essay, 'On Being 'White' and Other Lies',<sup>28</sup> in which he characterises whiteness as not a culture, not a community, as having no content, but which is nevertheless oppressive. This notion of whiteness as having no culture, no community and no content implies an opposition; the insubstantiality of whiteness as opposed to the substance and content of blackness. This opposition, explored at length by Toni Morrison, and discussed in the preceding section, has been an underlying theme in Afro-American studies in the US and notions of 'authentic blackness' have pervaded the literature and consciousness of black writing and popular culture, as described by Gilroy. The supposed content of blackness was a source of fascination for Norman Mailer's hipster, constructed by Mailer as the 'white Negro':

In this wedding of the white and the black it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (2006), 'Jews in the US.: the Rising Costs of Whiteness', in Becky W. Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi, (eds), *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, Routledge London: 25

<sup>28</sup> James Baldwin (1984), 'On Being 'White' ... and Other Lies', *Essence*, April 1984: 90

<sup>29</sup> Norman Mailer (1959), 'The White Negro', in *Advertisements for Myself*, Library of Congress reprint: 340

The apparent paradox of an empty oppressiveness as signalled by Baldwin is addressed by Dyer.<sup>30</sup> He suggests that the source of the power of whiteness is its very ability to appear to be 'nothing'; that whiteness has appeared to many whites to be unraced, and is, in one sense, invisible. It appears to be simply human; everything and nothing. Dyer is using invisibility both metaphorically and literally. The construct of invisibility has been a useful strategy in whiteness studies. It has been a means of naming that which, for many whites, seemed empty of content. It is also the case that whiteness has been literally invisible to many whites, who lack a lived experience of discrimination which would bring their identity into view. However, the notion of white invisibility becomes problematical when considered against a background, for example, of historical black invisibility: such as the complex phenomenon of blackface performance in theatres which frequently involved hidden black performers behind the mask of blackface, 'passing' as whites 'passing' as blacks; or the persistence of visibly white performances of cultural forms expropriated from black artists which have been the practice of the twentieth century; and the historical control of the black gaze. hooks comments:

In white supremacist society, white people can safely imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze... Black slaves, and later manumitted servants, could be brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving as only a subject can observe or see... These looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress), of relegating them to the realm of the invisible.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Dyer (1997) *White*, London Routledge

<sup>31</sup> bell hooks (1992) 'Black Looks: Race and Representation', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, London, Routledge: 340

hooks' comments suggest that invisibility is a contested term, offering markedly opposing meanings. For blacks, it was emblematic of their object status. For whites, in contrast, it implied the power to gaze without that gaze being returned. Useful as the concept has been in exposing the naturalisation of white privilege, it is problematised by the danger that the historical invisibility of others loses political salience as writing on whiteness now risks appropriating and inverting the language of marginalisation.

In contrast to the idea of a whiteness without content, Frankenberg<sup>32</sup> posits a whiteness which does indeed have content, generating norms, histories and ways of thinking about the self and culture. While the content of whiteness is mutable and contextual, she suggests it involves the generating of norms to do with codes of behaviour and modes of thinking. That these are not only racialised, but gendered, norms suggests that white power and privilege are compromised with regard to women. Moon<sup>33</sup> examines the fusion of race, gender and class in the discursive production of good white girls. The cult of true womanhood, she argues, is a bourgeois construct which historically has excluded women of colour as Carby and others have argued. Moon argues that the cult of white femininity derives its middle class status not from an economic position but from a notion of gentility based on a set of morals and mores which confer respectability. Through the cultivation of 'whiteness' white women gain access to a privileged identity. Via whiteness, women can transcend the category of Other in a male-supremacist society and occupy the privileged position of white womanhood in a white supremacist society. The empowerment of bourgeois white women is compromised, however; the effective performance of white femininity and respectability involve the suppression of criticisms and confrontation. The

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Frankenberg (1993), *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press

<sup>33</sup> Moon, Dreama G. (1996) 'Concepts of 'Culture': Implications for Intercultural Communication Research', in *Communication Quarterly*, Vol 44, No 1: 70-84

empowerment Moon claims for whiteness seems potentially hollow, or at least fraught with frustrations.

The concept of whiteness is a useful one in exploring how gender and class are invoked in the construction of the raced subject. Discourses of whiteness may operate to construct 'whiteness' in ways which are not self-evidently or only related to skin tone. This is an idea explored by Corinne Squire in her discussion of representations of 'trailer park whiteness' on talk shows. Constructed, she argues, as both white and non-white, talk show whiteness 'displays some of the larger than life, fantastic properties of renderings of blackness.'<sup>34</sup> So white audiences will say, these people are white, but not like me. Squire's argument here owes its shape to Morrison's account of Africanism, suggesting that audiences are accustomed to deploying signifiers of blackness in their readings of texts. It further suggests that where whiteness is constructed as unstable, this is signified via tropes of blackness. Squire's account is suggestive of the contemporary discursive power of racial binarisms, such that individuals come to be imagined via tropes of whiteness and blackness. Squire goes on to suggest that this compromised whiteness offers miscegenatory utopian possibilities. However, her own analysis of the 'white, but not like me' trope suggests that audiences, white and black, are less likely to read into talk show representations miscegenatory possibilities, but rather are more likely to suture into the ontological space between audience (Self) and representation (Other) an idealised bourgeois whiteness, which possesses the qualities of whiteness. This idealised whiteness is one which Foster terms the simulacra of whiteness; the image which precedes the reality, unachievable but always desired. More convincing from Squire is the argument that a cluster of signifiers associate poor whites with abjection. The representation of talk show whiteness in terms of difference intimates that pleasures for

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<sup>34</sup> Corrine Squire (2008), 'Lite' in Ellen G. Friedman and Corinne Squire, (eds), *Morality USA*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 208



‘white’ audiences are in terms of the frisson attached to difference, suggesting the continued privileging of the idealised white bourgeois subject position in relation to abject others.

The writers of the Harlem Renaissance gave considerable attention to the question of who is black and who is white. On the surface, whiteness and blackness appear to be related to skin colour. Whiteness studies, by its very designation, must assume a commonality of whiteness and so its relation to the maintenance of essentialist binaries is problematical. If the assumed commonality of whiteness is based on skin tone, then skin colour, Favor<sup>35</sup> suggests is not a reliable indicator of who may be designated white or black. For writers such as Nella Larsen, the concern is with the instability of whiteness and blackness. Heredity is muddled and racial identity a site of contestation. Favor’s analysis suggests a paradox of a binaristic raciology within which there is still contestation over who is white and who is black. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz’s construct of racial binarism is one of ‘white/color’:

Jews who look white in New York City look quite the opposite in the South and Midwest... It is not that a Jew like myself should ‘count’ as a person of color, though I think sometimes Jews do argue this because the alternative seems to be erasure. But that means we need another alternative. The problem is a polarisation of white and colour that excludes us... We need a more complex understanding of the process of whitening.<sup>36</sup>

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Kaye/Kantrowitz’s comments suggest, firstly that claiming ethnicity other than white or black may be understood as an attempt to break the ‘color-line’ by those who may be excluded from or refuse the categories of white or black, an issue which will be returned to in the next section. The point to be made here is that the case of Jewishness seems to

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<sup>35</sup> J. Martin Favor (1999), *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance*, Duke University Press

<sup>36</sup> Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996), *Jews in the US: the Rising Costs of Whiteness*, in Thompson and Tyagi, op.cit.: 25

exemplify the instability of identities, their relationality, and their openness to multiple and competing appropriations. It would seem that the exception, so far, to this axiom is the discourse of bourgeois whiteness. The discussion so far suggests that both the notion of white invisibility and the idea of a whiteness without content are problematical. The polyvalent contents of whiteness will be explored in the case study chapters. The discussion also suggests that it is bourgeois, masculine whiteness which continues to occupy the space of privilege, and Others constructed in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and class who are positioned relationally. However, it seems also the case that a notion of monolithic whiteness is unsustainable, as it is compromised in terms of class<sup>8</sup>, gender, ethnicity and region. Nor does the configuration of these categories for any individual construct a straightforward place in a fixed, ordered hierarchy. Identities, it is argued, are always becoming, constantly in flux, their prestige and salience linked to their discursive power, itself a shifting and always contested entity. Examples of shifting subject positions in relation to whiteness and the deployment of identities as a power resource will be discussed shortly. However some consideration of the context for current debates about whiteness is needed first.

### **The Re-discovery of Whiteness**

In the 1990s, one strand of the re-discovery of whiteness involved critical interrogations of whiteness in the academy producing a rapid proliferation of writing about whiteness as a raced identity. This focus appears to mark a change in emphasis, which in Morrison's terms, averts the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject. It is indicative, according to Gallagher,<sup>37</sup> that whites are becoming more self-conscious of their whiteness, although there is some disagreement over the degree to which white self consciousness

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<sup>37</sup> Charles A. Gallagher (2003), 'Rethinking the Color Line: Understanding How Boundaries Shift', in Charles A. Gallagher, (ed), *Re-thinking the Color Line: Readings in Race and Ethnicity*, New York, McGraw-Hill: 1-5

has entered popular discourse, and what a greater self-conscious about whiteness among whites would mean. However, beyond the recent establishment of white or whiteness studies as an academic discipline in the academy, there has been a recovery of a genealogy of interrogations of whiteness; this genealogy includes writing by WEB Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin, Nella Larsen and writers of the Harlem Renaissance which drew attention to the problem of white privilege and was preoccupied with its relation to blackness. Re-readings of the white canon of American literature are suggestive, also, of an earlier white self-consciousness. For example, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* has been re-read as a meditation on whiteness as inhuman and incomprehensible. For Ware and Back, whiteness in *Moby-Dick* is the contradictory sign of terror as well as innocence. For Babb, it expresses an idea only openly being discussed today - the need for whiteness to be deconstructed. The already existing genealogy of critiques of whiteness is taken by Ware and Back as an indication that the recent academic interrogation of whiteness is not bringing anything new to interrogations of whiteness. However, this position seems to misunderstand the nature of historiography. There can not be an equivalence or interchangeability between nineteenth century readings of whiteness, and those from the nineteen-twenties or the nineteen-nineties. The important questions that need to be addressed in relation to the most recent writing about whiteness are the related ones of why the re-discovery of whiteness? And why now?

Robyn Wiegman has addressed this question in a contribution which raises important questions but displays some paradoxes. In her essay, 'Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity',<sup>38</sup> she questions the legitimacy of whiteness studies. However, in the same essay she produces a close reading of *Forrest Gump*, arguing that it reproduces white privilege as innocence, erased of racialised histories; an analysis which would seem

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<sup>38</sup> Robyn Wiegman (2002), 'Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity', in Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (eds), *The Futures of American Studies*, London, Duke University Press: 269-304

to be a contribution to the interrogation of whiteness, which is the aim of critical white studies. That she is now able to make this reading is arguably a result of recent attention to whiteness as a raced identity. Wiegman suggests more pragmatically self-interested motives for the interrogation of whiteness by whites related to the contraction of academic posts generally in the US, and in particular of traditionally European focused courses, in which were mainly employed white academics. Whiteness studies, she suggests, provides a new source of full-time employment and tenure for white academics, so that whiteness studies is itself implicated, in Lipsitz's<sup>39</sup> phrase, in the possessive investment in whiteness. Wiegman takes issue with what she sees as the narrow focus of whiteness studies on economically disempowered whites, both working class and poor as minoritised white subjects and the disciplinary discursive production of white masculinity as marginalised. Her critique of the methodology and focus of whiteness studies is partly a result of her selection of texts to exemplify the field, and constitutes an effort to draw some artificial boundaries delimiting the field of investigation, and of her critique. Her analysis is based on critiques of what have come to be delineated as the white trash, class solidarity and race traitor schools. The white trash school explores the construction of poor whites in classist and racist stereotypes as 'white trash', from a perspective which emphasises the commonalities between oppressed whites and oppressed racial groups. Poor whites are understood as another minority in a pluralist multiculturalism.<sup>40</sup> The class solidarity school explores the historical development of a racially divided working class, in which working class whites are viewed as settling for the, often spurious, benefits of whiteness rather than recognising their shared class interests with oppressed racial groups. Writers in this school, such as David Roediger, start from a position which seeks to unite working class whites and blacks and an analysis derived from a Marxist perspective.<sup>41</sup> The race

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<sup>39</sup> George Lipsitz (2006), *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press

<sup>40</sup> Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (eds) (1997), *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, London, Routledge

<sup>41</sup> David R. Roediger (1999), *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London, Verso

traitor school takes a position which is opposed to the white trash school, in that it asks whites to abandon any aspiration to a positive racial identity, corresponding to those of oppressed racial minorities. This is necessary because the content of whiteness as a raced identity is only ever oppressive. Instead whiteness must be abolished by whites.<sup>42</sup> While there has been a considerable amount of work in these areas, they do not represent all of the discursive field of whiteness studies, as it is hoped this study will demonstrate. Nor is it clear from Wiegman's argument why she sees investigation of whiteness specifically in relation to poor and working class whites as not 'legitimate'. It makes sense only if she is assuming firstly, that it is class alone which defines objective and subjective reality, and secondly that there is a straightforward, knowable and fixed, correspondence between objective reality and subjective experience. These assumptions are challenged by the work of both Pfeil (1997) and Gallaher (2003), which will be discussed shortly. Her claim that there is a risk that whiteness studies produces a discursively minor white masculinity seems to rest on an assumption of monolithic whiteness as the site of unified privilege. As previously argued here, that position seems untenable in the face of whiteness internally differentiated by ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, not to mention age and health.

However, her critique of the methodology of whiteness studies gets to the heart of debates about its legitimacy as a field of study. She argues that on the one hand it rests on a model of agency for the transcendence of whiteness, positing a humanist subject, and on the other it relies on a social constructionist model for explaining whiteness. This contradiction, she suggests, emerges via a particularising of the experience of whiteness evident in much of the personalised, autobiographical narratives of whiteness explored in the work of Frankenberg, Lazzarre,<sup>43</sup> and others, for example, in which a socially

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<sup>42</sup> Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (eds) (1996), *Race Traitor*, London, Routledge

<sup>43</sup> Jane Lazzarre (1997), *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness, Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons*, London, Duke University Press

constructed whiteness is named via an encounter, in which the narrator recognizes (usually) her, or (occasionally) his, own whiteness and becomes conscious of it as a raced identity. In this way, the neo-liberal subject acknowledges the history of white supremacy, but via the articulation of a narrative of a new anti-racist white self enacts a distancing from that history and, the inference is, from the privileges which still accrue from it. However, the turn to ethnography did not emerge with whiteness studies, but rather has emerged in a range of disciplines, sociology and history in particular, influenced particularly by the impact of feminist methodology. Wiegman's critique raises issues for methodologies evident across disciplines and fields of study. However, her position is that it is particularly pertinent to whiteness studies because, she suggests, critical whiteness studies seeks its own transcendence. In this sense it is clearly marked out from such disciplines as sociology or history, which are 'legitimate', in Wiegman's terms because not 'exhaustible'. There is, in her analysis an unspoken evaluation of identity based academic fields such as women's studies or African-American studies as worthy because they take as their focus identities which have been systematically oppressed, whereas, whiteness studies recentres attention on the oppressive identity. This concern appears to be linked to that which she raises with regard to the issue of institutional complicity in generating academic 'jobs for whites' in the new field of whiteness studies. Her argument here is concerned with whether whiteness studies is simply a way to recentre and resecure whiteness, now as a neo-liberal and self-reflexive identity: a project not a million miles from that which she reveals, in a convincing reading, to be at the heart of *Forrest Gump*. This is something of a *volte face* in her argument, as the emergence of whiteness studies is theorised as an effect of white agency. However, the concern about recentring whiteness is an important one, addressed by some of the work on whiteness, by Dyer for example, and certainly those engaged in studying whiteness need to address their own positionality. However, an important argument in support of whiteness studies is that mainstream silence around

whiteness is part of its power to remain the default identity. The naming of whiteness and uncovering its histories is understood as a necessary part of making that power visible and so dismantling its privileges. It will be argued shortly, by reference to specific historical case studies that disavowal, as much as the claiming of whiteness, has been a strategy in resecuring its privileges. A more difficult issue to address, and one not raised by Wiegman, is the concern expressed earlier, in relation to Gilroy's designation of black in the black Atlantic, and in the assumed commonality of whiteness in the construction of a discrete whiteness studies is that the use of reifying language remains problematical if the aim is to transcend racial binarisms.

However, while Wiegman's overt arguments against whiteness studies rest on her premise that as a discipline it represents white privilege in a new neo-liberal guise, her comments also hint at the broader global decentring of whiteness:

Some might say that the critical rush to whiteness is leading to the bigger question of whether the political force of white writing can be separated from its political symptoms.<sup>44</sup>

The recent re-turn to whiteness needs to be understood in the contemporary political context of the decline of traditional cultural, national and political discourses of identity. Historically white self-consciousness has surfaced unevenly and in response to specific configurations of racial and ethnic politics, an unevenness which the discourse of a monolithic whiteness serves to obscure. Gallaher<sup>45</sup> locates the 1990s North American re-discovery of whiteness in a specific moment of a decline in ethnic affiliations. Americans born in the 1970s, she argues, are less likely to have a mother tongue other than English.

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<sup>44</sup> Mike Hill (1997), 'Introduction: Vipers in Shangri-La: Whiteness, Writing and Other Ordinary Terrors', in Mike Hill (ed), *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, New York, New York University Press: 1

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Gallaher (2003), *On the Fault Line: Race, Class and the American Patriot Movement*, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield

In addition, cultures derived from ethnicities such as Irishness, Italianness, and so on no longer provide a basis for solidarity. Into the resulting 'ethnic vacuum' enters an identity grounded in race, whiteness. Whiteness as an identity resource has been available for deployment since the middle decades of the twentieth century, she suggests. Gallaher's account suggests that, post-World War Two, a racial binarism emerged reflecting the politicisation of race as, firstly, the nascent civil rights movement drew on growing black political consciousness and secondly, the beginnings of 'white flight' from inner cities to the suburbs reflected a fully-developed white-self consciousness which Jacobsen suggests had been emerging since the 1920s. It has already been suggested in this discussion that whiteness has been available for deployment as a modern raced identity for much longer. However, Gallaher's and Jacobson's comments suggests its uneven historical development, and that its claiming or refusal is contextual. Comments by Negra<sup>46</sup> are suggestive that its re-emergence in the middle of the twentieth century is linked to a project of nation building, economic recovery and American hegemony. These matters will be returned to shortly. However, it is not clear why a contemporary decline in ethnic affiliation and a corresponding adoption of whiteness should lead to a contemporary 'critical rush to whiteness'. An explanation that assumes a context of broader global and local shifts in the prestige and power of competing identities is offered by Stuart Hall, Isaac Julien, Kobena Mercer and others.<sup>47</sup> That an interrogation of whiteness has re-begun is suggestive of what Hall and Mercer term a decentring, an actual shift in power and privilege. They suggest that there is currently an ongoing decentring of whiteness as the privileged identity. White self-consciousness, they suggest, emerges at precisely the time when privilege is uncertain; when prohibitions and constraints of whiteness may be felt as

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<sup>46</sup> Diane Negra (2001), *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom*, London, Routledge

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Hall, David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (1996), *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London Routledge; Isaac Julien & Kobena Mercer, 'De Margin and De Centre', in Hall et al, *ibid*.



restrictive. Roediger's<sup>48</sup> autobiographical introduction tells of prohibitions in his white, German-American neighbourhood against conspicuous consumption, disparaged as acting 'nigger-rich'. Dyer<sup>49</sup> recounts a story from his youth, in which he tells of feeling leaden-footed and white at a disco because he could not dance like the black men present, so recounting an enduring stereotype of blackness. These tales are recounted by these authors, not as examples of privilege, but of prohibitions and constraints attached to whiteness, and in Dyer's case, envy. That whites are feeling less certain of privilege may be, on the one hand, provoking a new critical self-reflexivity for whites. On the other, it may be the context for the emergence of narratives of white victimisation, which will be discussed shortly. However, two historical examples will now be discussed to illustrate the argument that whiteness, rather than being a monolithic entity, has been claimed or resisted opportunistically in different locations and in different times.

### **The Social Mobility of Whiteness**

Historical accounts of the trajectory of whiteness demonstrate its social mobility. Jacobsen's nuanced account, which there is not space to do justice to here, suggests that there was an 'Anglo-Saxon', rather than a white hegemony in nineteenth century America. However, from the mid-1920s, he argues, newer immigrants were progressively 'whitened', such that 'race' came to refer not to ethnicities, as it did prior to the twentieth century, but to a black/white binarism. What the content of an Anglo-Saxon identity, or a white identity, might be is not directly addressed by Jacobsen. He is concerned, as is the case with much of the historical work on whiteness, not so much with the specific content of identity subject positions, but rather with tracing their historical emergence in context. In

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<sup>48</sup> David Roediger (1999), *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London, Verso

<sup>49</sup> Richard Dyer, op.cit.

an account which begins earlier than Jacobsen, Babb<sup>50</sup> locates self-conscious whiteness earlier than the twentieth century, suggesting that while Englishness was the early American hegemonic identity, its displacement by the category 'white' was begun in the revolutionary period. Roediger's account supports the idea of a pre-nineteenth century whiteness, citing evidence of self-conscious whiteness in the writings and legislature of the 'founding fathers'. As mentioned earlier, by the terms of the Naturalisation Law of 1790, citizenship was limited to free, white persons, and reasons for the framing of the law in this way have already been considered. A further question arises as to what conditions have led to the rises and falls of whiteness as the hegemonic identity. This is an enormous question beyond the aims or scope of this project, however, a discussion of selected examples can serve to illustrate moments of transition in which one identity position is claimed and another is refused. The examples which follow undermine the notion of a monolithic whiteness but suggest rather that it is one identity strategy available for manipulation in the deployment of ethnic resources. They also suggest that the manipulation of whiteness involves its triangulation in relation to some version of ethnicity understood as European, and so deploy some version of a 'white' Atlantic in their constructions of identity subject positions. A consistent element in the configurations of these triangulations is of the opposition of Europeanness and blackness. The first example describes the forty year transatlantic correspondence between Emerson and Carlyle. It is included for two reasons: firstly, to suggest that the decline of whiteness as the hegemonic identity in the first half of the nineteenth century and the rise of Anglo-Saxonism, established as the hegemonic identity by 1850, according to Roediger and Jacobsen depended on the active construction of an Anglo-Saxon racial (in terms of nineteenth century understandings of race) identity in the mid-nineteenth century; secondly to highlight an early episode in the construction of a prototype of the Special

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<sup>50</sup> Valerie Babb (1998) *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*, New York, New York University Press

Relationship between Britain and America, one which unapologetically valorises imperialism.

### **Emerson, Carlyle and an Atlanticist Paradigm**

The correspondence evidences, in their mutual celebration, a fervent desire on the part of each to construct a shared racial heritage. Describing Carlyle as ‘the best thinker of the Saxon race’ Emerson wrote to Carlyle in 1834, inviting him to lecture to audiences in Concord, Massachusetts, saying:

And ’tis good to have a new eye inspect our mouldy social forms, our politics, and schools and religion. I say our, for it cannot have escaped you that a lecture upon these topics for England may be read to America.<sup>51</sup>

Carlyle concurred:

Looking over the water, let me repeat once more what I believe is already dimly the sentiment of all Englishmen...that we and you are not two countries, and cannot for the life of us be; but only two parishes of one country with such wholesome parish hospitalities, and dirty temporary parish feuds, as we see; both of which brave parishes, Vivant! Vivant!<sup>52</sup>

The correspondence suggests an identification in the making, rather than one established. Emerson poured his admiration for an imagined Anglo-Saxon subject into his book *English Traits*, published in 1856. This was a meditation on whether race or culture was at the root of England’s imperial success. Emerson’s exercise in English traits seems to have been undertaken in order to ‘trace’ Anglo-Saxon connections and heritage for Americans, and together with the transatlantic correspondence between him and Carlyle, it may be

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<sup>51</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joel Myerson (1999) *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Columbia, Columbia University Press: 130

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson (2008), *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872*, Volume 1, Charleston, SC, BiblioBazaar: 33

seen as rejecting the generic identity of whiteness in favour of the opportunistic deployment of a new, Anglo-Saxon, one; the constituent elements of which were available for appropriation on both sides of the Atlantic. What may have prompted this shift in identity subject positions was a context in which the category of whiteness had become compromised. In the face of mass migration in the mid-nineteenth century, from Ireland and from continental Europe, to the United States and mainland Britain, the privileging of the category white was compromised by the arrival of groups who appeared white, but were perceived as racially Other. What was needed for Emerson and Carlyle was the construction of another elevated identity for their identified group to resecure its hegemonic position against the democratic potential of whiteness. Anglo-Saxonism was available as a resource, and may have appealed particularly due to its 'guaranteed' whiteness; the whitest of whitenesses. However, it was also associated with romantic notions of Anglo-Saxon resistance to the Norman yoke, invoked by Jefferson in grounding his claim of American rights. The deployment of Anglo-Saxonism resurfaces in Hollywood cinema, in *Robin Hood* (Michael Curtiz, US, 1938) and *The Vikings* (Richard Fleischer, US, 1958) as will be discussed shortly in a brief consideration of cinematic transatlantic paradigms. The second case study concerns the fate of 'Nordic whiteness' in the post-civil rights era.

### **Nordic Whiteness in the Post-Civil Rights Era**

Post-civil rights, Jacobsen argues, there emerged an ethnic revival, the 'just-off-the-boat' spirit of which invoked European origins in the construction of new American identities. Jacobsen locates the ethnic revival in a desire to recuperate a usable past. Groups other than WASPS distance themselves from the history of white oppression, in the process constructing the category of the 'blood-soaked Nordic American' which has gained currency as being emblematic of white supremacy in its extreme forms. Its invocation, for

Jacobsen, is part of a strategy of displacement of racism onto WASPS. The iconography of Nordic whiteness, as invented in nineteenth and twentieth century visual culture, and reaching its high point in DW Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (US,1915), constructed an identity now pushed to the margins, due to its associations with the KKK and Nazism. The shift in the prestige of Nordic whiteness has occurred, not coincidentally, since the Second World War. Diane Negra discusses the decline in popularity of the Hollywood persona of Sonia Henie, the 1936 Olympics figure skating gold-medallist. Negra's discussion suggests that competing appropriations of Nordic whiteness were already apparent in the 1930s. As a Norwegian, Negra argues, Henie's whiteness was 'guaranteed'. During the depression, the iconography of the white girlish body spoke of recovery in ways otherwise unavailable; the aspiration for national recovery was intertwined with an emerging mid-twentieth century reclamation of whiteness. However, Henie's image came to be compromised by its potentially Aryan associations. In the knowledge of Nazi genocide, Henie's guaranteed whiteness appears to have been read less benignly and her 'hyper whiteness' became problematical. As previously mentioned, Jacobsen views the post-civil rights, post-Second World War, construction of an extreme Nordic whiteness as part of a strategy by other ethnic groups to displace racism on to WASPs. However, it arguably does more than this. It seems that the strategy ultimately allowed the construction of a new, marginal and Other, subject position, already coded as extreme whiteness. In contemporary cinema, television and advertising, American images of poor whites overlap with representations of rural and/or Southern whites, who not necessarily poor, are frequently represented as Other. They occupy abject subject positions in relation to constructions of metropolitan, North-Eastern whites and blacks as sophisticated, educated and liberal; for example, the talk show representations of whiteness discussed earlier in the chapter. This trope has a post-fifties genealogy in popular cinema, exemplified by *In the Heat of the Night*, (Norman Jewison, US,1967) and its recent deployment as

emblematic of evil, in films such as *A Time to Kill* (Joel Schumacher, US, 1996) or *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, US, 1999) for example, leaves 'ordinary, everyday' WASP whiteness undisturbed. The two examples, Emerson's and Carlyle's discursive deployment of Anglo-Saxonism against a generic white subject position, and the decline and fall of Nordic whiteness suggest, on the one hand, that whiteness is by no means monolithic, but is rather internally differentiated and contested. Shifting meanings within the category white demonstrate its internal differentiation and contested nature. The examples also illustrate the ways in which the disavowal of whiteness may actually operate to maintain white privilege, whether of a bourgeois kind, or the less readily located 'ordinary, everyday whiteness'. The content of these two slippery categories will be explored in the case studies chapters. The next section will consider another strand of the re-discovery of whiteness: the narratives of white victimhood which emerge out of the restructuring of cultural, economic and political realities of the last two decades and the concomitant decentring of white masculinity. The narratives of 'white injury' do not set out to interrogate the content or privileging of whiteness, rather they seek its recuperation. Whiteness becomes an identity subject position from which a set of cultural, political and economic grievances can be given coherence.

### **The Narrative of White Victimisation**

A significant discussion in the re-discovery of whiteness is concerned with narratives of white victimhood, which have emerged in both rural and suburban locations. Post-civil rights, so the narratives go, there is no longer a need for affirmative action programmes. Terms such as reverse racism and reverse discrimination have become part of the lexicon of white victimhood in which affirmative action programmes are perceived as unfair instances of white victimisation. If many whites now perceive themselves as the losers in a new level playing field, Apple suggests that working through college, living with parents

and with only a McJob to look forward to in the end, is a situation that makes it hard to convince young whites that they are privileged.<sup>53</sup> In a meritocracy, the narratives continue, whites are now unfairly discriminated against in education and employment. Writers such as Ignatiev<sup>54</sup> and Roediger reject the usefulness of terms such as reverse racism. They point out that since racism implies the systematic power to dominate and that since people of colour lack that power, reverse racism is a meaningless construct. However, such abstract arguments will not mean much in the narrativisation of whites as the new victims. Fred Pfeil<sup>55</sup>, Carolyn Gallaher<sup>56</sup> and McCarthy<sup>57</sup> et. al. each locates the narratives of white injury in a white, male experience of displacement from a former position of privilege and autonomy. Fred Pfeil addresses the content of this narrative in a consideration of the discursive repertoires of 'some white guys' who belong to militias and patriot organisations. In the public sphere, he suggests, these groups are understood as white supremacist and patriarchal. However, Pfeil argues, their aims are not primarily racist and / or sexist, but rather anti-federalist. They see the nation-state as responsible for policies which lose their jobs and create affirmative action programmes and housing projects which help minorities. Pfeil suggests that where the militia-men and self-styled patriots might reasonably blame transnational corporations and their labour market strategies, they do not. For Pfeil, this is partly because such an analysis is too abstract, but also in part because of old associations with TNCs which were once family-owned paternalistic affairs. Sentiment and nostalgia prevent painful recognition of their changed corporate nature, so it is easier to blame the government and scapegoat minorities and women who are seen as gaining unfair advantages. The experience of these men is now one of 'bafflement, grief and rage'

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<sup>53</sup> Michael W. Apple (1998), 'Foreward', in Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg, & Ronald E. Chennault, (eds), *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, New York, St. Martin's Press

<sup>54</sup> Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (1996) *Race Traitor*, London, Routledge

<sup>55</sup> Fred Pfeil (1997), 'Sympathy for the Devils: Notes on Some White Guys in the Ridiculous Class War', In Mike Hill, op.cit.: 21-34

<sup>56</sup> Carolyn Gallaher, op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> Cameron McCarthy and Greg Dimitriadis (2000), 'Globalizing Pedagogies: Power, Resentment and the Renarration of Difference', in Ram Mahalingam & Cameron McCarthy (eds), *Multicultural Curriculum: New Directions for Social Theory*, New York & London, Routledge: 70-84

at the loss of their former racial and patriarchal privileges, 'no matter how small'. Gallaheer provides an account of rural radicals and their sense of grievance. The context for their 'bafflement, grief and rage' is one in which the economic boom of the 1980s bypassed many pre-dominantly white rural communities. Gallaheer suggests that as the state no longer mediates between capital and labour, it is the right rather than the left which has effectively harnessed the ensuing resentment via calls to class anxiety without a concomitant call to emancipation. However, class anxiety is only one parameter of the discourse of resentment constructed by 'rural radicals' or patriot movements. Historically, rural radicals were a solidarity phenomenon of small farmers uniting to protect their economic and political interests. However, in its different incarnations it has also produced vigilantes targeting variously, Blacks, Jews, Native Americans, Catholics and 'uppity' women. In its current formation, it might be better understood as rural reaction, as it coheres around a cluster of neoconservative and far right issues, and is uneasily positioned between a tradition based on ideals of equality and a social agenda steeped in white supremacy. McCarthy et al focus on a particularly suburban version of the narrative of victimisation. The 'politics of resentment' is a peculiarly white, middle-class suburban narrative which links white, male and middle-class anxieties about displacement with a new white identity politics. McCarthy et al<sup>58</sup> suggest that a narrative of the white subject is constructed in terms of a group ancestry, now threatened by a contaminating Other, and feeds into a distinctly suburban white identity politics in which the suburban (white) home is in need of protecting from inner city (non-white) predators. They trust neither Republicans nor Democrats to represent their interests and turn instead to discourses of racial origin and white supremacy. Their position is confirmed by film and television culture which positions its audience as middle class, suburban and in white flight, producing and disseminating the discourses of the 'reality' of blackness and the inner city.

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<sup>58</sup> Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (1993), 'Introduction: Theories of Identity, Theories of Representation, Theories of Race', in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (eds) *Race, Identity and Representation*, New York, Routledge: xii-xix



The suburban middle-class knows its other(s) not interpersonally, but via the media simulacra of the inner city and signifiers such as 'the hood', 'blackness' and 'hardness', guaranteeing its 'authenticity'. McCarthy et al term these 'soothing narratives' of confirmation. Narratives of white victimhood have significant ideological resonance on both sides of the Atlantic, as will be illustrated in the case studies which follow, and their transatlantic articulation and mediation makes them a key element in the contested discursive repertoire of a white Atlanticist paradigm. How these narratives of white victimhood are appropriated or repressed in transatlantic cinematic mediations will be explored in the case study chapters.

The discussion in this chapter has argued that identities are never fixed, and that their deployment whether by privileged or marginalised groups is always political and contingent in struggles over cultural prestige, political power, and economic resources. The claiming or refusal of whiteness in the US has not only been strategic and opportunistic, but frequently within a framework of transatlantic triangulation. This theme will be explored in depth in the case studies to follow which will illustrate an argument that re-discovery of whiteness has involved its mobilisation in competing discourses of whiteness on both sides of the Atlantic expressed in polyvalent cinematic discourses of whiteness. However, this chapter will end with a brief genealogy of the deployment of whiteness and Atlanticist paradigms in Anglophone films at key moments in identity politics from the 1930s to the 1960s, to show the shifting meanings and configurations of transatlantic whiteness as political and contextual.

### **The Deployment of White Atlanticism in Film**

In the 1930s Fred Astaire and Errol Flynn in their different personae serviced narratives of national recovery and emerging American hegemony via a reclamation of whiteness. *Top*

*Hat* (Mark Sandrich, US, 1935) constructs a white Atlanticist paradigm in which America is signified as bringing youth, democracy and autonomy to a Europe of constraints and prohibitions. It deploys the persona of Fred Astaire as Jerry Travers, a dancer and an Adamic figure, seemingly newly made in America, and exported to Europe. The persona of Astaire deploys both guaranteed whiteness and Africanism to reconstruct an autonomous new white man. Jerry has arrived to perform in London as the film opens. The first scene takes place in a London gentlemen's club of wood panelling and leather Chesterfields, the only sounds those of the ticking clock and gentle snoring. Into this almost silent, seemingly ancient space, with its ancient members, and inevitably ancient privileges, Jerry brings noise and disruption, disturbing, momentarily, the slumbering members. Persuaded to leave hurriedly by his 'sissy' producer, Horace (Edward Everett Horton), Jerry's parting act is to announce his presence with a noisy tap step properly waking up the members. Both Morrison's and Negra's arguments are useful in making sense of the use of Astaire's persona in *Top Hat*. Negra's comments concerning Sonia Henie, and the way in which the aspiration for national recovery in the depression era was intertwined with an emerging mid-twentieth century reclamation of whiteness, may also be applied to Astaire. Like Henie, Astaire's whiteness was 'guaranteed', and though adult, his body has the lithe slenderness of adolescence. Childlike in many ways, he signifies innocence and transgressiveness abroad and displays adolescent qualities: brash and charming, disruptive and appealing, his most memorable quality is transgressive narcissism, evincing a prototype metrosexual persona.

In a significant scene, Jerry dances his most spectacular sequence alone watched by Horace, signifying his freedom and autonomy. This variation on the male gaze is intriguing, suggestive of both objectification and wished for identification; of both desire and envy in the audience. Horton as Horace, the feminised man, does not dance; does

not delight in the freedom of his own physicality. As we have seen, he abides by the rules. In contrast, Astaire's Jerry is a new force in the world. The iconography of the Astaire body, in its freedom and transgressive physicality, announces American recovery and emerging hegemony. However, in a startling inversion of the meanings 'traditionally' associated with blackness, this iconography offers hybrid pleasures. The Africanist presence embodied in Jerry's freedom and transgressiveness, signified by tap dance and jazz music, recalls Dyer's and Roediger's envy of the supposed freedom of black masculinity. Astaire's newness is signified by a combination of the appearance of guaranteed whiteness with the supposed *freedom* of Africanism. The new white American man, constructed in opposition to European fossilisation, and a feminised, therefore constrained masculinity, deploys signifiers of blackness in the production of autonomous and transgressive masculinity, while visually erasing the undemocratic, prohibitions of the racialised history which have produced him.

In the same era, Errol Flynn's persona of guaranteed whiteness served the rhetoric of recovery and emerging hegemony. *Captain Blood* (Michael Curtiz, US, 1935) offers an exercise in ethnic distancing from WASP terror while claiming white privilege via transatlantic triangulation in the production of a white fairytale. Publicity material around Flynn frequently glossed over his Tasmanian identity and played up a supposed Irish ethnicity as Flynn's (and Blood's) Irishness by this era had become almost uncompromised whiteness but retains the frisson of non-WASP rebelliousness. The lighting for Flynn in promotional stills and moments of spectacle in *Captain Blood* and later in *Robin Hood* makes his whiteness glow as described by Dyer in his discussion of lighting to enhance whiteness. Like Astaire, Flynn's persona was boyish and his performance of masculinity depended on physicality, as demonstrated in the spectacle of his athleticism as a swashbuckler. Like Astaire, the persona was brash and transgressive but charming.

In *Captain Blood*, in the England of James II and the time of British colonialism in America, the Irish Dr. Blood (Flynn), enlightened humanist, is wrongly convicted of treason and is sentenced to become a transatlantic galley slave. As a slave, Blood, the non-WASP, but guaranteed white self, suffers the lash and is chained. He escapes to become a pirate against England in a replay of the American Revolution, and finally triumphs as governor of Jamaica. The iconography of slavery invokes the Atlantic trade in black slaves even as it displaces it with imagery of a specific moment of Irish indentureship and transportation. At the same time, via identification with Blood, the erasure of the white (American) self as complicit in black Atlantic slavery is enabled by its narrative origin in England. Now expunged of this complicity, and indeed having been the object of slavery's oppression, the white self can assume its destiny as ruler. The narrative and iconography of *Captain Blood* rehearse the 'not-me' of both Africanism and opposition to Old World European oppression. This allows simultaneously the narrativisation of white victimhood, privileged identity and manifest destiny. Three years later, in *Robin Hood* (Michael Curtiz, US, 1938), the narrative of Anglo-Saxon resistance to Norman oppression, to which whites in both America and England have a romantic attachment, is replayed. As the threat of war in Europe loomed, the Hollywood configuration of transatlantic triangulation shifted to suggest not opposition and difference, but sameness. As discussed earlier, as the war progressed Nordic whiteness became compromised to be displaced by 'ordinary everyday whiteness'. This is evident in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, US, 1942), which deploys an Africanist presence in a story, apparently, about whitenesses.

Humphrey Bogart became emblematic of America in the film *Casablanca*. *Casablanca* may be read as a Jewish Atlanticist text from a particular moment, its incarnations as play and film being written by second generation New York Jewish migrants. Bogart plays Rick, owner of Rick's bar in Casablanca. While war is waged in Europe, refugees from the

war and Nazis and their collaborators meet in Rick's Café. Meanwhile, all Rick wants is to be left alone to run his bar. Expressive of the concern to bring America into World War Two, the character of Rick may be read as standing for American isolationism, and the bar for America. However, Rick is reminded of the events in Europe by the arrival of Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman), his one true love, now with her husband Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid), a noble resistance fighter, whose name, and circumstances, may code him as Jewish. Their arrival at Rick's bar, fleeing the Nazis to carry on the fight, forces Rick to rethink his isolationism, and help them. Ilsa, who may be read as representing besieged Europe, reminds Rick of what Paris meant to them. Bergman's Nordicness is played down, unlike Henreid's; her whiteness is of the 'ordinary' kind, extreme bloneness being reserved now as the sign of *femme fatale*, such as Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, US, 1946).

Rick's alienation from his past and from emotional entanglements allegorises American reluctance to enter the war, and it is his reconnection to the past which brings about his change of heart. However, In *Casablanca* the romantic desires of individuals must be set aside in the face of the Nazi menace. The film's deployment of the nostalgic idea of Paris as former city of romance and love serve only to more strongly mark its wartime role as departure point for the death camps. The surrogate for Rick's emotional life is the figure of Sam (Dooley Wilson), the black piano player who at Ilsa's behest plays *As Time Goes By*, beginning, 'You must remember this...'. By restoring to Rick his emotional past and connections to Ilsa and Paris, Sam brings about a morally reshaped America, now hybridised and creolised via his presence; an America reconnected to a usable version of the past, which comes to the rescue of besieged Europe. The question arises as to why such a surrogacy should be necessary. Morrison's analysis would suggest that it is to articulate those emotions, and crucially, parts of the self, which have been repressed, even

while it is this repression which allows the construction of the American as the new white man. This deployment of Africanism would suggest that Rick is reinvented as a new white American, which in one sense he is. As he says near the close of the film, he now has a job to do. In this reading, Sam may be seen as a figure signifying moral agency, whose presence enables Rick to make the moral choice, a role assigned to black figures in literature, as Morrison has outlined. However, the idea that Rick's American whiteness needs to be secured is less than convincing. An alternative reading allows that Sam's surrogacy is also about remembering Jewishness in an inversion not only of the process of Americanisation as generic whitening, as discussed by Rogin, but also an inversion of the 'not me' trope of Africanism explored by Morrison. In Morrison's work, 'not me' is a construction which allows the new white American to mark difference from not only an unfree black population, but also the European past. However, as already noted, Sam *reconnects* Rick with an Old World past. The suggestion here is that Sam's surrogacy may be read as reversing the generic whitening of Americanisation, and reconnecting Rick with not only European, but specifically Jewish European roots. Rick, Ilsa, and Victor may stand in, not simply for America and Europe respectively, but also for Jewish America and Europe. In this reading, *Casablanca* is a story deploying Africanism to tell a story about Jewish people.

The post-war British film, *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1946), articulates and resolves tensions about post-war American hegemony, Americanisation and post-colonialism via the production of transatlantic whiteness. This is achieved by the narrative and visual recentring of whiteness, and by the gendering of Britain and America as masculine and feminine respectively. While the film refers eclectically to non-cinematic sources, in particular to seventeenth century neo-classical painting, twentieth century surrealist photography, modernist architecture and

English metaphysical poetry, it nevertheless displays a filmic intertextuality which is central to the production of meaning in the film. Its visual eclecticism and privileging of imagination over experience can be read as key elements in its composition as a cinematic metaphysical poem. By means of stylistic signifiers, the film suggests a tension between (English) neo-Romanticism and (European) modernism, while offering audiences visual pleasures presented by both. This tension is mirrored narratively in an opposition which is constructed between the rights of the individual and the demands of the collective: between the life and death of the title. Metaphysical concerns and imagery drawn from neo-classical paintings are interwoven with, and counterpointed to, filmic references to articulate a neo-Romantic conception of England already popularised in war-time British films such as Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, UK, 1944). *AMOLAD* constructs modernism as English Romanticism's Other, privileging the latter, narratively. This privileging is significant for a reading of the film's politics, because while modernism (death) is represented as multi-racial and ordered, Romanticism (life) is represented as white, anarchic and innocent. However, our first glimpse of England signifies Arcadia, as in a Poussin painting, perhaps reminding the audience that death is here too.

The story begins on 2nd May, 1945, with English Airman Peter Carter (David Niven), radioing from his plane which has been shot down. He has no parachute, but must bail out anyway or 'fry'. As befits a metaphysical poet, which we later learn he is, he feels most intensely alive as he is leaving life. He speaks his dying message to American June (Kim Hunter), a radio operator from Boston. Before he bails out he recites to her lines from Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*, a poem concerned both with seduction and seizing the moment. At this point the narrative offers ambiguous readings; either Peter dives to his death in the sea below and the narrative which follows represents his

imaginative life after physical death; or else, miraculously he survives, carried by the tide to shore, saved, as we soon discover by a fog coming in from the Atlantic. However the narrative is read, Peter at first believes himself to be dead, but then finds that he is not. In that moment he sees June, riding home from the base on her bike. They recognise each other immediately and realise they are already in love. Meanwhile, in another world, which we are given to understand is the afterlife, or heaven, the mistake has been realised: Peter is alive when he should have died. The task now is to escort Peter to heaven, where he should be. However, Peter, who was ready to die at the 'proper time', is now unwilling because he loves June, and so he lodges an appeal which must be heard in the heavenly court. Not just Peter, but England, is on trial in the court, and the prosecutor, Abraham Farlan (Raymond Massey), a stern figure, is an American revolutionary, from Boston, killed by an English bullet in 1775. The iniquities of English imperialism are called to account and contrasted with American virtues of liberty and democracy. These virtues are, however, ultimately shown to have their origins in England, as does Farlan, it is revealed. So Peter (England) finally wins his appeal, and lives to be with June.

After Peter is washed up on the shore, he comes across the Arcadian image of a naked boy goatherd sitting among the dunes, playing a wistful tune on a pipe to his animals. This may be heaven, it seems. The spell is broken when the boy speaks not in the language of angels, but in an earthly estuary, directing Peter to the base. This heavenly place is in fact England, and Peter is alive. The *mise-en-scene* of England in this sequence contrast sharply with that of heaven which incorporates imagery in the style of surrealist photography and modernist iconography reminiscent of both Eisenstein and Riefenstahl, particularly in the depiction of the mass crowd who gather to witness Peter's (England's) trial.



This modernist heaven is shown to be inclusive, multi-racial and classless. White American servicemen are told when they arrive, 'We're all the same up here'. When Peter's co-pilot, Bob (Robert Coote), arrives in heaven's white space reception area, he is shown the scene, through a panopticonic hole, of the floor below, in a shot derived from Moholy Nagy or Man Ray. He sees ant-like clerks toiling as the sound of an eternal clock ticks ceaselessly. Bob is horrified, but is reminded by the administrator that for some people, to be a clerk would be heaven, so the contemporary appeal of narratives of equality is acknowledged. Heaven's multiracialism is emphasised when, during Peter's trial, the camera pans slowly across the mass of black American servicemen. These still, lifeless, figures become briefly animated when Peter's (England's) defender, Dr. Frank Reeves (Roger Livesey) plays a jazz big band recording to Farlan as an example of 1940s American culture. Much is made by the prosecutor of the American melting pot as an ideal model, while Peter's defender acknowledges America's protection of freedom and rights of the individual by choosing an American jury. However, the potentially progressive imagery of a multi-racial heaven is undermined by a number of features, both formal and narrative. Farlan's invocation of the melting pot is suspect, resting as it does on a glib erasure of histories of racial and ethnic inequalities and conflicts in America. Neither Farlan nor Frank are able to make sense of the jazz record. This may be because they are both 'past it', as is implied, but it is reasonable to suppose that audiences also understood that they do not 'get it', because it is black music and they are white. Only, the black servicemen, amongst the mass of those gathered, 'get it'.

The way in which non-whites appear as part of the modernist mass, as anonymous heroes, echoes Eisenstein's privileging of the collective. It also provides a further example of Morrison's citing of Africanism and the uses of blackness in developing whiteness. The rejection of heaven by Peter, suggests not only a rejection of Soviet style collectivism, the

other pole in the emerging post-war political binarism, but also a rejection of a multi-racial future, both of which are signified in the modernist heaven. That Peter and June are united at the end may be read as an embrace of the American melting pot, as constructed by Farlan and Frank, however this reading is undercut by the inclusion, but containment, of non-white figures in heaven as a strategy of marking racial identities in order to signify limits to racial hybridity, and limits to the shape of Americanisation; the black figures exist in order to be recognised and excluded allowing a cautious acceptance of American hegemony and the post-war transatlantic alliance as a special white relationship. This acceptance is also made possible by the gendering of England and America in the figures of Peter and June. As signified in the opening scene, June is the seduced and Peter the seducer, the former, throughout, displaying all the signs of whiteness as described by Moon. The film embraces a white Atlantic, the threat of American hegemony and of post-colonial anxieties being contained by the whitening and the feminisation of America in the figure of June. That this heaven is a white space does not negate this reading. It is a specific whiteness, resonant in the aftermath of Nazism. Modernism has now become associated with extremes; the extreme whiteness of heaven signifying death and sterility.

The final examples come from the late 50s and early 60s cycle of films produced and starred in by Kirk Douglas. These texts were produced at the high point of the civil rights struggle and use a metaphorical transatlantic space to reflect on this struggle, and may be read as offering versions of Jewish Atlanticism. The first of these, in collaboration with director Stanley Kubrick, was the low budget, black and white, *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, US, 1957). Set during the First World War, the film deals with the scapegoating of three French soldiers by the French army. The film exposes the arrogant sense of divine right and the corruption inherent in the culture of the army top brass, and thereby suggests the master / slave narrative of European, and in particular, French institutions

and culture. It offers a counterbalance to the romanticisation of Frenchness in Hollywood romantic musicals such as *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minelli, US, 1951) and *Gigi* (Vincente Minelli, US, 1958), which erase the history of French collaboration in the holocaust. The *mise-en-scene* is a potent one, deliberately so from the Jewish producer and director, reminiscent for a generation of film audiences of the Dreyfus affair as represented twenty years earlier in *The Life of Emile Zola* (William Dieterle, US, 1937), a film also of cultural resonance in dealing with anti-Semitism in the 1930s. Intertextually, the film invites comparison between the anti-Semitism and classism of Old Europe. In the 1950s context of civil-rights it may be read also as an expression of solidarity with that movement. However, it remains, visually, a story about white people. The Africanist presence though not explicit in the film, must be brought to it in the context of its reception. So the film may also be read as distancing the origins of racial inequality from contemporary America back to the Old World.

Douglas collaborated again with a Jewish director, Richard Fleischer, on the high budget genre movie *The Vikings*. This action-adventure saga exploits the contemporary popularity of the sword and sandals genre to allegorically play out the history of American racial conflicts, displacing them via transatlantic triangulation, to ancient historical European locations which are made to stand in for American locations. Moving between Anglo-Saxon England (The North) and Scandinavia (The South) the plot begins with the rape of a Saxon princess by marauding Viking chief, Ragnar (Ernest Borgnine). The child, Eric, who is the result, is sold at a young age into slavery. The plot focuses on the conflict between Eric (Tony Curtis), the former slave, and Einar (Kirk Douglas), Ragnar's Viking son, to win the Welsh princess, Morgana (Janet Leigh), whose whiteness is guaranteed by both her ethnicity and bloneness. Douglas exploits every post-World War II signifier of Nordic whiteness in the performance of Einar, including white hair, brutality, and a lust for

conquest and power. Einar represents a version of injured whiteness, metaphorically, as he is baffled and enraged when denied the privileges he believes are rightly his, in this case access to the body of Morgana on his terms; and literally, as his eye is plucked out by a falcon at the command of Eric.

The references to contemporary racial conflicts over civil rights are apparent. In the film, the Saxon king of Northumbria, Aella, and Saxon nobility, have the veneer of civilisation in speech and manners, but are shown to be cowardly, cruel and without honour, representing a reversal of the romanticisation of Anglo-Saxonism in earlier, white Atlantic, narratives. Between the extremes of the corrupt and degenerate Saxon nobility and the bestial Vikings is the (runaway) ex-slave, Eric. The Africanist presence is channelled via the racially ambiguous Eric, visually neither of guaranteed whiteness, nor blackness. [The following year, Billy Wilder cast Curtis as the cross-dressing, race-changing character Joe/Josephine in *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder, US, 1959), playing on Curtis's visual racial ambiguity]. At the same time Eric's ordinariness is signified in opposition to the extremes of Einar and Aella, suggesting Jewishness and blackness can be ordinary and everyday. Eric's sea crossings enact allusion to transatlantic slave crossings, this point being emphasised by the marked inclusion in the boat of a black character who otherwise appears to have no other role in the plot. Eric, something of a reluctant hero, in contrast to earlier heroes of guaranteed whiteness, comes to realise his purpose is to save the princess, who is, in Proppian terms, the object of the hero's desire. Allegorically, the princess represents an idea of America which must be saved from destruction at the hands of either Aella or Einar. As Welsh, she represents a foundational, thus guaranteed, white American identity, while at the same time as a 'Celt', she is effectively distanced from WASP oppression. The figure of Eric may signify a Jewish version of ethnic revival, as a response to the histories of European oppression of Jews, and American oppression

of blacks. However, more convincingly, he may be read as signifying Jewish and black solidarity, and a rejection of the forms of whiteness represented by Aella and Einar as Eric must kill both Aella and Einar to save the princess. Were this all that happens, the film might be read as a hybrid text, refusing racial binarisms and white privilege. However, at the film's close, there is ambivalence towards Einar. Unable to kill Eric, once he knows they are half-brothers, Einar hesitates and is then killed by Eric. In death, Einar becomes noble and worthy of the melodramatic, memorialising funeral, which is the emotional climax of the film. That there is no room for sentiment - Einar as representing extreme whiteness must be killed - seems to be the message on the one hand. Yet, the elegiac funeral suggests his loss can be mourned now he is safely in the past. At the moment of Einar's death, Morgana becomes the film's, hitherto absent, moral compass. Eric has endured suffering, and has been focused on survival. Many of his early scenes, of suffering and of escape are lit only darkly, so that he lacks definition, visually and figuratively. He doesn't know his own identity, and he only becomes knowable, and literally visible, and whitened, as he comes to know Morgana. She reveals to him, as Einar is dying, that he and Einar are brothers. As Eric realises that he has killed his own brother, Einar is now redeemed, while guilt, and responsibility, transfers to Eric with this new knowledge. With this rather biblical motif, the film seems to suggest that with civil rights come responsibilities, which can be fulfilled within the foundational institutions of white America, now expunged of the aberrant legacy of slavery. However, most convincing is a reading of Eric's slavery, and metaphorical blackness, and his journey out of slavery, signified by his progressive whitening, as an allegory of a Jewish journey out European Otherness into American whiteness.

Douglas once more collaborated with Kubrick on *Spartacus* (US, 1960) two years later to again allegorise American racial conflicts via the story of a slave rebellion against the

Roman Empire. The narrative explores the sexual exploitation of slaves, and the emasculation of male slaves, as the slaves Spartacus (Kirk Douglas), Varinia (Jean Simmons) and Antonius (Tony Curtis) are at the mercy of their Roman masters' desires; and so obliquely also addressing the taboo issue of miscegenation. While the story may be read as alluding to American plantation slavery, nevertheless, like *The Vikings*, *Spartacus* displaces the history of plantation slavery once more to Europe. The Roman masters are white, English bourgeois accented, played by actors steeped in high cultural prestige, notably Laurence Olivier. In contrast, the male slaves are multi-ethnic, multi-racial and American accented. As a result of this configuration, the slave rebellion of Spartacus, on the one hand, signifies the experience of transatlantic slavery, while on the other, it slips into its erasure; for, if for the slaves read America, and for the Romans read Britain, Spartacus's rebellion elides into another replay of the American Revolution. The film becomes a way of reconfirming American innocence, even while it acknowledges the wrongs of slavery, as it erases American complicity in its history.

The foregoing examples suggest the historical mutability of whiteness and its political deployment in transatlantic triangulations. That it has no essential content is apparent, however, it has historically constructed meanings which have cultural resonance and power. The next chapters will examine its development and the political meanings which attach to its deployment in more recent films from the 1970s to the present day.

## Methodology

The politics of cinematic representations of racialised transatlantic whiteness are at the focal point of this project, and what is assumed to be at stake in these representations is the mobilisation of power. This chapter sets out some grounds for this assumption, and for the research methodology deployed in the case studies which follow. In particular, two matters need addressing. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these is the question of why films are the chosen medium to examine, and the corollary of why particular films have been selected. A second, and closely related consideration, is the choice of textual analysis as the analytical tool of interrogation, and in particular, the issue of the reliability and validity of textual analysis as a method. It is proposed in this chapter to address the latter question first, because out of that discussion a rationale for both the choice of methods and a focus on film will be developed. Based on the evidence presented in relation to these issues, it will be argued that film operates in unique ways as discursive practice in the construction of identities, with attendant implications for the politics of the texts explored in the case studies.

Textual analysis is a broad term encompassing a range of different methods, all of which, it may be argued, are inevitably brought in to play whenever a text is analysed, at whatever level. Almost from the beginning of this investigation, it was felt that some version of textual analysis would be the main research tool, an intention formed by reading and appropriating the methodologies of some of the key writers who have eventually influenced the shape and direction of this project. There was, at the start of the project, some consideration of whether the primary research method should be textual, ethnographic or some mix of the two. However, audience ethnography was rejected early on as an inappropriate method. This was a decision based to a limited extent on

resources, but mainly, the rationale was a methodological one. This decision was made despite an academic trend away from textual analysis and towards ethnography; textual analysis as a method having undergone some critical interrogation in recent decades, while ethnographic approaches to understanding the relationship between text and reader have been favoured. Having chosen to do textual analysis, an epistemological problem which loomed large at the outset was whether it is possible to interpret the meaning of a text, a question which is at the heart of a development in post-modern thought which has turned away from textual analysis. The methodological approach developed to address this matter emerged heuristically as it became plain that methodology is no less the object of discourse than the question to be researched, and a methodology to solve all epistemological problems proved to be elusive. The methodology which was pursued derived from an eclectic mix of post-structuralist and structuralist epistemologies as a range of research techniques for film interpretation were found to be necessary and useful; including semiotics, content analysis, and approaches derived from genre analysis, narratology and discourse analysis. These tools were used simultaneously, often intuitively and pragmatically, utilising a given method for its strength and applicability. Any coherence evident in the finished project is a result of the attempt to situate all analyses within an overall post-structural framework. The following discussion offers a defence of this approach.

Despite attendant epistemological questions, the choice to focus on texts was prompted, initially, by a sense that representations are both powerful and symptomatic. These unscientific suspicions were reinforced by readings of Richard Dyer's *White* (1997)<sup>59</sup> and Fred Pfeil's *White Guys* (1995)<sup>60</sup>. Both of these writers begin from the assumption that representations are politically powerful, and in these particular works, representations are

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), *White*, London and New York, Routledge

<sup>60</sup> Fred Pfeil (1995), *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*, London and New York, Verso



understood as implicated in the complex processes of the construction of whiteness. For Dyer,<sup>61</sup> in *White*, the focus is on the text, and not the actual histories of white people:

My focus is representation... not directly about how white people really are, how we feel about ourselves, how others perceive us... This is about how white people are represented, how we represent ourselves.<sup>62</sup>

This is because, he argues, it is only by *how* anything is represented that we recognise and understand it. In an earlier work, *Stars* (1979) Dyer focuses on stars and their cultural significance. Stars, he suggests, are both influential and symptomatic social phenomena, and readings of them involve a continuous dialectical movement between semiotic and sociological interpretations on the part of the reader. The point of relevance for this discussion is his argument for the dialectical relationship between the text and the social world.<sup>63</sup> He goes on to argue that while the study of representations is not the study of reality, it *is* the study of one of the most significant ways by which we can know reality.<sup>64</sup> Representations of white people, for Dyer, are the means by which to make sense of white people. That such representations are politically powerful is paramount in his analysis, as he claims, 'racial imagery is central to the organisation of the modern world'.<sup>65</sup> Dyer sees this power as a consequence of the ways in which, since the nineteenth century, photographic media have developed into the primary and authoritative means of knowing, thinking and feeling about the world,<sup>66</sup> so that, 'Western society is characterised by the albeit troubled centrality of vision to knowledge and power.'<sup>67</sup> The technologies of vision, he suggests, are central to our conceptual assumptions.

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: xiii

<sup>63</sup> Richard Dyer (1979), *Stars*, London, BFI.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: xiii

<sup>65</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: 1

<sup>66</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: xiii

<sup>67</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: 106

Dyer's approach is indebted in no small degree to semiotics. In *White* he interrogates a range of film and photographic texts with the aim of exposing their meanings, assumptions and politics. He considers the aesthetic and technical paradigmatic choices, in relation to *mise-en-scene* and *mise-en-shot*, made by producers of film texts. These choices are not, Dyer suggests, independent of prevailing cultural discourses. Rather they are constructed within those discourses.<sup>68</sup> This position suggests that in *White*, Dyer has been influenced by the post-structuralist turn in textual analysis, and in *White* he attempts to combine a semiotic method with a post-structuralist epistemology. In doing so, he goes some way towards addressing the epistemological questions which critics of the method and its methodological assumptions have posed. However, in his advocacy for textual analysis, Dyer does not deal head-on with these questions. The next section will consider, briefly, why textual analysis has recently been less favoured, and how the post-structuralist turn to discourse may be seen as addressing some of the critical concerns.

In some part, this may be due to its association with writers sympathetic to Marxism as a theoretical and political framework, and the epistemological problems raised by the encounter between semiotics and Marxism. Influential among these theorists was Roland Barthes, whose seminal uses of Saussurean semiotics fundamentally shaped understandings of the relationship between text and audience on the Left, and the uses of textual analysis as a research tool.<sup>69</sup> However, concomitant with post-structuralist deconstructions of meta-narratives such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, there has been a sustained epistemological critique of textual analysis. Methodologists favouring ethnography have argued that to begin with the text is to begin from the wrong place. Textual analysis, it is argued, begins with the *a priori* assumption that exposure to the text produces some kind of ideological 'effect' on the audience which it is the task of the

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<sup>68</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit.

<sup>69</sup> Roland Barthes (2000), *Mythologies*, London, Vintage; Barthes, Roland, (1977), *Image, music, text*, London, Fontana

researcher to uncover.<sup>70</sup> Marxist discourse has frequently overlapped with an effects discourse. These overlapping discourses position audiences as passive consumers of media messages and appearances which mystify and distort reality. However, this perspective has become unfashionable, and furthermore, it seems to have reached an epistemological impasse. The pervasiveness of Marxism's decline in favour is, arguably, in part due to its basis in class as the primary source of power and inequality in capitalism; a model which may have appeared to have little to offer in the context of post-civil rights identity politics. Marxism's epistemological problem is related to its difficulty in reconciling its foundation on a realist conception of ideology<sup>71</sup> with an anti-realist epistemology derived from Saussurean linguistics. The realist conception of ideology posits a distinction between an empirical reality and representations of it. The former cannot be known via its representations because they are at best partial, and at worst distortions of it. For Lovell, this notion is at odds with Barthes', and others', Saussurean structuralism which is anti-realist in its logical conclusion that there is no reality to which a given representation can correspond, only constructions of reality in language.<sup>72</sup> Given that the Marxist project rests on acceptance of a reality, knowable outside of representations, and transformable, this opposition would seem to be irreconcilable.

The cultural Marxist, Stuart Hall, developed a model which attempts to retain a commitment to the power of ideology while rescuing the audience from passivity. He proposed the idea that meaning is contingent upon the conditions of reception, the germ of which was already present in Barthes writing on semiotics. Hall summarised his model as one of encoding and decoding, in which the creators of texts encode messages into texts and audiences decode them in the process of reading them. According to Hall, texts are encoded with *preferred* meanings by those who create them. Such meanings are, in

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<sup>70</sup> W. Brooker and D. Jermyn (eds) (2003), *The Audience Studies Reader*, London, Routledge

<sup>71</sup> R. Lapsley and M. Westlake (1988) *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Manchester, Manchester University Press

<sup>72</sup> Terry Lovell (1980), *Pictures of Reality*, London, BFI

mainstream texts, in conformity with the dominant ideology. However, the producer has no control over how the text is decoded by the reader. Readers may accept, oppose or negotiate with the preferred meaning; their reading being contingent upon their socio-economic location, such as class, gender or ethnicity, for example.<sup>73</sup> Hall's approach owes much to Raymond Williams's discussion of taste, but his account goes further in making explicit the moment of reception for the construction of meaning. However, he undermines his commitment to the power of ideology by his turn to Derridean polysemy. That the politics of a text are open to interpretation inevitably raises the question as to which interpretation is the most valid and by what criteria. If a reader's interpretation is dependent on what they bring to the text, then there are potentially as many readings as there are readers, each as valid as the next. Or to restate the problem for Hall's attempt to retain ideology as an operational concept in another way, in a heterogeneous culture, semiotic analysis leads to not one valid reading but a potentially infinite number.

Hall's account is an attempt to steer a course between retaining the humanist conception of the conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject of the Enlightenment, exemplified in his socio-economic categories, and its (post-) structuralist opposite. However, in contrast to the idea of the unified Enlightenment subject, Judith Butler suggests that the post-structuralist individual performs a range of subject positions, such as femininity, or whiteness.<sup>74</sup> Identity is not innate, but rather it is socially and, crucially, *historically* produced in a range of discursive practices, or performances, such as camp, masculinity, femininity and so on, the meanings of which are continually contested. The post-structuralist conception of subjectivity is a fragmented thing; it is a site of conflict in which the individual may simultaneously take up conflicting subject positions. This is a crucial insight which underpins the assumption, in this project, that identities are never fixed.

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<sup>73</sup> Stuart Hall (1974), 'The television discourse - encoding and decoding' in Gray, Ann and McGuigan, Jim (eds), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader*, (2nd edn), London, Arnold: 28-34

<sup>74</sup> Judith Butler (1993), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London, Routledge

However, it will be argued in this chapter that these understandings may be undermined by the affective power of cinema to represent race as 'self-evident'. Pfeil's eclectic approach in *White Guys* (1995) exemplifies some of these insights from post-structuralism. For example the idea that whiteness or masculinity can refer to a unified subject is brought under scrutiny, to challenge the construct of a monolithic straight white masculinity, as Pfeil notes, 'The modalities of white straight masculinity are multiple, and/or riven by contradictions and fissures, and/or subject to flux and change'.<sup>75</sup>

Given the apparent endless semiosis of the text, and its corollary of fragmented subjectivity, it might seem that it is not possible to arrive at any meaningful interpretation of a text. However, it is the contention here that the post-structuralist turn from a realist epistemology enables interpretation. Post-structuralism abandons the concept of ideology, offering a conception of subjective consciousness freed from the need for it to be either true or false. This means that paradoxically post-structuralism enables a new understanding of the relations between reality and beliefs about it. Foucault's notion of discourse collapses the binary opposition between reality and appearance integral to the Marxist conception of ideology. Foucault uses discourse or discursive formations to refer, in part, to groups of statements which provide a way of representing an idea or object.

In Foucault's formulation, identities are produced in cultural languages, that is discourses, which neither reflect nor distort a pre-existing reality. In discourses of identity we locate ourselves self-reflexively and in relation to others, and so identities are relational. These statements regulate what is sayable and knowable at any historical juncture, to produce what Foucault terms, a regime of truth. Discursive practices, constituted in language, are central to the reproduction of or resistance to social power. This idea can be illustrated with reference to a model from Derrida, that of the binarisms structuring identity in terms of

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<sup>75</sup> Fred Pfeil (1995), op.cit: x

hierarchically related oppositions. For example, the binarism **masculine**/feminine overlaps with those of **reason**\emotion, **culture**\nature, **public**\private and ultimately, **self**\other and **subject**\object, to represent men and women respectively. In this group of statements is produced a discourse of gender in which power operates to produce and reproduce gendered subjectivity. A similar matrix of binarisms might be applied to the construct **white**\black, in which **white** is understood as the privileged **self** and black as the marginalised Other. Discourses operate across texts and institutions in intertextual relays. In other words, it is both in symbolic forms and sets of practices that discursive power operates. Representations are the visual codings or groups of statements, through which real individuals live out, or perform identities. Discourses maintain their power when they come to seem naturalised and inevitable. It is to reveal how these hierarchies and meanings have come into existence that Foucault advocates the genealogical method.

To some degree, the genealogical method, moves away from the traditional semiotic approach of privileging an individual text in a close reading for its intrinsic meaning. Foucault is interested in how meaning is both created and reshaped across the discursive field of representations, a logical corollary of Derridean polysemy and the endless signifier. It is a method adopted by Pfeil in *White Guys*. *White Guys* offers an interrogation of representations of white masculinity in popular culture, across texts and formats and in different institutional settings: from mainstream cinema, to rock music, to hard-boiled detective novels. In tracing the vertical and horizontal genealogies between texts Pfeil is able to identify meanings which are both symptomatic and productive of contemporary narrative agendas. However, for both Foucault and Pfeil signs and their meanings remain central, albeit unfixable, elements in the production of discourses. Where Foucault moves further away from the structuralist version of semiotics is in the way that he theorises subjectivity. In Saussurean semiotics, the subject is produced in the system of cultural

signs, the code or language which is not historically grounded. In contrast, in Foucault's concept of discourse, the subject is produced in a set of rules and practices which, as previously noted, govern what is sayable and knowable in any historical moment.

Discourse allows that both reality and knowledge about it are shaped by experience and history; that the question is not whether it is experience or knowledge which is the guide to reality, because both are inseparable in the construction of subjectivity which drives discursive practices.<sup>76</sup>

The connection of discursive practices to representations is profound as discourse determines what is recognised as 'true' in any historical moment, and which individuals or subjects are privileged as embodying those 'truths'. Discourses, whether true or not, if they are accepted as knowledge, become real in their effects, and constitute what Foucault has called a regime of truth. Deploying the concept of discourse enables representations to be theorised in terms of their politics, and what Pfeil terms their narrative agendas.<sup>77</sup> Like Pfeil, Toni Morrison's<sup>78</sup> approach in *Playing in the Dark* (1993) is to combine semiotic tools with a post-structuralist intertextual reading across a selection of texts, to argue the case for their political effects. However, in contrast to Pfeil, her focus is not popular culture but the work of white canonical authors of American Romantic literature. She foregrounds the ways in which black people and tropes of blackness have been used as signifying markers in these works. Her concern is with the ubiquitous trope of blackness and its denotative and connotative significations. Her semiotic method is to interrogate the writerly, paradigmatic, choices involved in the production of the text; the selections and uses of language to convey meanings. From this examination, she draws conclusions for the discursive political power of texts. Morrison's case, that a white

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<sup>76</sup> Michel Foucault (1979), *Discipline and Punish*, London, Penguin; Michel Foucault (1980), *Power/Knowledge*, Harlow, Longman

<sup>77</sup> Fred Pfeil, op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> Toni Morrison (1993), *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, London, Macmillan

American identity was forged in such a way that in America, American means white, rests on an argument that the 'new white man' <sup>79</sup> was constructed in a symbiotic tension with a constructed literary Africanist presence. Morrison claims her interest in *Playing in the Dark* is not primarily with the actual histories of African people and their descendants in America, just as Dyer claims his interest is not with the real lives of white people. However, these claims, though perhaps intended to forestall criticism that they offer no reference to empirical persons, compromise to some degree their arguments for the discursive power of representations. Such a claim is not made by Pfeil, who connects the narrative agendas he identifies to real political contexts and consequences.<sup>80</sup>

So the project follows the precedents and methods of Dyer, Morrison and Pfeil, and deploys the epistemology, though not the style, of the latter. It pursues a model of textual analysis, involving semiotic readings of texts, combined with a post-structuralist emphasis on their genealogical and horizontal intertextuality, to interpret their discursive meanings. Of course, an important difference between the approaches of Dyer, Pfeil, and Morrison, respectively, is in the latter's application to literature, while Dyer focuses on visual media, and Pfeil ranges eclectically across both, and beyond. There are both pragmatic and epistemological reasons why this project is focused on film. In practical terms, there was, inevitably, a need to set limits on the scope of the project in the interests of manageability. It was partly for such pragmatic considerations that, for example, it was decided to focus on film alone rather than, say, film and television. While as moving image forms they share much in terms of their metalanguages, their institutional histories and contexts of reception are quite different. To attempt to examine both in a single project was felt to be risking making only a superficial gloss of each. However, the decision to explore moving images rather than literary texts, paintings, or other expressive art forms rests primarily on

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<sup>79</sup> Toni Morrison, op.cit: 47

<sup>80</sup> Fred Pfeil, op.cit.



some assumptions about the special nature of film as a form in which racial identity is apparently self-evident, with concomitant implications for representations of identities:

Whereas painting is thought to rely upon a resemblance relation between the referent and its representation, the photographic arts, including cinema, are believed to sustain an identity relation between their referents and their representations.<sup>81</sup>

These assumptions are longstanding, and emerged, as Dyer has suggested with nineteenth century photography. Such beliefs are, arguably, the source of the authority and power of the photographic image which Dyer refers to. For Dyer, the power of cinematic representations is to do with their affective potential, particularly in relation to the bodily senses of sight and sound. He comments, 'I emphasise both the making involved, the production of the ideas of peoples, and the full affective, sensuous weight of the word *sense* as well as its more cerebral one.'<sup>82</sup> Dyer uses the term 'sense' suggestively, picking up on the post-structuralist insistence on the body as a site of discourse.<sup>83</sup> Racialised ways of seeing are, for Dyer, inseparable from the cultural technology of film which has visually privileged whiteness. To consider the implications of this emphasis on film in relation to the senses, the next section will make some formal comparisons between film and literature in the production of racialised identities.

Writing, according to Morrison, allows the possibility of the writer becoming the Other. In her concern to explore the literary and wider cultural implications of what she terms American Africanism, her language continually invokes ideas of invention, fabrication and imagination. Noting the writerly choices and selective use of language which writing involves she identifies the allegorical and metaphorical work that an Africanist presence

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<sup>81</sup> Noel Carroll, (2004), 'Concerning Uniqueness Claims for Photographic and Cinematic Representation', in *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, Volume 1, (eds) Simpson, P., Utterson, A., and Sheperdson, K.J., London, Routledge: 29

<sup>82</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit: xiii

<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault (1979), op.cit

performs in the articulation of whiteness in the nineteenth century American literary canon. Her concern is to emphasise that the writer's choices of allusions and metaphors is political and not pre-determined. Alternatives are always possible. The writer, in the act of imagining, is able to enter into the identity of the estranged Other:

Imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*.<sup>84</sup>

This point is illustrated by James Baldwin's writerly choices in *Giovanni's Room* (1956), in which he writes about a sexual relationship between two white men. In doing so, he takes the point of view of a white character. In writing white characters, 'as if white', it may be argued that Baldwin destabilises the racial binarism black/white, while however, confirming what Allan Berube has described as the 'gays stay white' rule.<sup>85</sup> Berube suggests that discourses of mediated gay identity police its boundaries, effectively marginalising or even excluding gay men of colour. Further work to explore this theme in Baldwin's work is yet to be done. In relation to the discussion here, arguably, writing, unlike other expressive cultures allows the possibility of transcendence of the phenotypical qualities upon which racial categories have been constructed. Music, Blake suggests does not allow this. Nor, the suggestion is here, does film. In film, racialised identities appear as self-evident, a consequence, the argument is, of the paradox of film that, with the additional mimetic technologies of sound and movement, it both records reality and mediates it at the same time. It is this paradox of film as medium which Susan Sontag captures in her writing on photography.<sup>86</sup> The contradictions she apprehends in her account speak of the way in which film is both mimetic and interpretive. The argument here is that it is the conjoining of these qualities that make film a particularly powerful medium in terms of representations of

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<sup>84</sup> Toni Morrison (1993), op.cit: 4

<sup>85</sup> Allan Berube (2007), 'How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White it Stays' in Tania Das Gupta et al (eds), *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto: 363-373

<sup>86</sup> Susan Sontag (1978), *On Photography*, Penguin, London

identities. This idea can be illustrated by reference to the film *Suture* (Scott McGehee, UK, 1993). The film exposes the way in which film appears to offer transparent representations of racialised identities, while manifestly demonstrating its constructionist features. *Suture* is a low budget thriller, the plot of which concerns two brothers, Vincent and Clay who meet for the first time after their father's funeral. Vincent plots to kill Clay with a car bomb, take his identity, and start a new life with his father's inheritance. However, Vincent's plans go awry. Clay survives and it is Clay who takes Vincent's place, after undergoing surgery to restore his face and memory. The interesting, and deliberately unsettling, aspect of the film is that Vincent and Clay are portrayed by Michael Harris (white) and Dennis Haysbert (black) respectively. At their first meeting they comment on how alike they look. Later, when Clay is undergoing treatment and living in Vincent's house, none of the other characters appear to notice the self-evident racechange that Vincent has undergone. The visual commutation of white into black undermines racial self-evidence, or in McCabe's terms, the 'truth' of the conventionally privileged image-track<sup>87</sup> is denied by the dialogue and narrative and turns the text into a meditation on film's simultaneous capacity for mimesis and construction. *Suture* creates a dissonance by presenting a contradiction to the senses. It can only do this, however, by contradicting the discursive regime of truth which produces race as an object of knowledge. In contrast, mainstream cinema's apparent mimesis of racialised identities creates no such dissonance and confirms prior discursive knowledge of race.

Before going on to the stage of analysis, some decisions had to be made regarding the selection of films. Here, a loose version of content analysis was used from the start of the project. Indebted to the positivist tradition, content analysis is conventionally a process in which a large sample of texts is surveyed for the occurrence of pre-constructed categories

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<sup>87</sup> Colin MacCabe (1985), *Theoretical Essays*, Manchester, Manchester University Press

of themes, images and values to ascertain how frequently they occur.<sup>88</sup> As an approach, it is frequently presented as being at odds with post-structuralism's interpretive, qualitative, methodology. In contrast the positivist epistemology underpinning content analysis has been based on the gathering of measurable data and repeatability of results to produce what are presented as objective, universal, findings. However, in contrast to the apparent scientism claimed for content analysis, it may be argued that the construction of the categories to be measured is, inevitably, a subjective decision, therefore undermining at the outset claims to scientific objectivity. It is also the case that the decision as to which comes first, category construction or text selection, involves some subjective choices concerning the questions to be researched. Even before the supposedly neutral measurement stage is reached, claims to objectivity fail to convince.<sup>89</sup> Content analysis's failure to achieve scientific objectivity is not, however, seen as a pressing problem in this project.

As mentioned above, an informal version of content analysis was employed in the selection of texts. The two categories which were constructed to identify texts likely to be relevant to the themes of the project were, not surprisingly, 'whiteness' and 'transatlantic themes'. The approach provided a path on which to proceed, and in the beginning led the project in the direction of the London films of Richard Curtis, which eventually formed the core of the chapter on transatlantic Romantic-Comedy. However, the meanings which were attached to the terms transatlantic and whiteness at that stage did not remain static, and they acquired new layers. Nor was their discursive overlap easily evidenced, though it was intuitively felt. The connotations of transatlantic were laden with popular and historical references to Churchill/Roosevelt and Thatcher/Reagan which romanticised the 'special relationship' between Britain and America. However, the term also bore the negative

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<sup>88</sup> David Hesmondhalgh (2006), 'Discourse analysis and content analysis', in Gillespie, M. and Toynbee, J. (eds) *Analysing Media Texts*, Maidenhead, Open University Press: 119-157

<sup>89</sup> David Hesmondhalgh (2006), *op.cit.*

connotations of those associations, for example represented in the well-known anti-nuclear poster, parodying the film *Gone With the Wind*, which substituted Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan for Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable, and so obliquely referred to the whiteness of the 'special relationship'. The connotations of whiteness were seemingly less ambiguous. Its recognition as a racialised identity seemed highly contained; limited to specific historical and geographical locations, such as the American South, or the British Empire. The terms transatlantic and whiteness seemed to be more overtly connected in the critical reception of the Richard Curtis films of the 1990s. They had become emblematic of a new orientation in British cinema, hybridising British and Hollywood genres to achieve transatlantic success: a source of both praise and condemnation.<sup>90</sup> In Britain, they were criticised for their whiteness; primarily representing Britain as almost homogeneously white and middle-class,<sup>91</sup> ingredients understood as aimed at targeting the US market. *Four Weddings and a Funeral* also appeared, when viewed from the distance of some years, at a historical juncture which anticipated the Blair-Clinton alliance. Notwithstanding the paradigmatic gender swap of Carrie for Clinton, the film's theme of on-off transatlantic romance between the British upper-middle class, public-school, Charles (Hugh Grant) and Southern American Carrie (Andie MacDowell) protagonists seemed symptomatic of some prevailing cultural sensibilities and anxieties attached to the terms transatlantic whiteness. These connotations were explored in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and beyond, in an intertextual genealogy. The genealogical method revealed that the terms transatlantic whiteness had become constitutive of a sub-genre of romantic comedy with a white Atlanticist narrative agenda. It became the focus of that chapter to explore the discursive politics of the transatlantic Rom-Com.

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<sup>90</sup> Nick James (2001), 'They Think It Is All Over', in Robert Murphy, (ed), *The British Cinema Book*, 2nd edition, London, BFI

<sup>91</sup> Paul Dave (2006), *Visions of England: Class and Culture in Contemporary Cinema*, Oxford, Berg

The genealogical method led not only forwards to more recent developments in the genre, but also back, via readings of intertextual borrowings and references, to the 1970s romances of Woody Allen. In contrast to the later 90s development of the genre, in the Allen films, the terms transatlantic and whiteness were nuanced differently and were productive of a discourse critical of the trajectory of contemporary US politics. The chapter explores their mobilisation in a counter hegemonic discourse of an alternative Atlanticism, constructed in opposition to a rightward shift in US culture and politics, and their deployment in problematising ethnic absolutism and the privileging of whiteness. The use of romance as a metaphor for these themes is explored.

Post 9/11, the terms transatlantic whiteness acquired new meanings in the context of the War on Terror. It was possible to identify a new sensibility of anxiety and tension evident in discourses of whiteness and Atlanticist politics. These new meanings were revealed and developed in part in a reading of *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, US/UK, 2006), chosen because of its *urtextual* qualities in expressing a new and complex position in relation to the transatlantic alliance. In an intertextual relay the terms transatlantic whiteness bring to this text their prior connotations of the romance of the 'special relationship', but overlaid with a new sensibility of anxiety, and a problematising of the transatlantic alliance, in a changed context and a new economy of signs. That the representation of white, straight, masculinity in this text is expressive of these changes was suggestive of a modality of masculinity identifiable across a number of films of this period, and earlier, which are positioned in some way in relation to hegemonic Atlanticism. The chapter further explores these representations and their politics in *Fight Club* (David Fincher, US, 1999), *The Bourne Identity* (2002), as well as in *Children of Men*.

This chapter has outlined the research tools and methodology applied to the case studies to follow: A loose content analysis, triangulated with a post-structuralist semiotics, and a self-reflexive approach to interpretation, within a post-structuralist understanding of discourse. This eclecticism allows for the idea that meanings change as signifiers slide, and that texts are not discrete entities but are themselves made up of many interconnected texts. It has attempted to address some of the epistemological problems arising from the decision to do a textual analysis of selected films, and to provide a rationale for nevertheless doing so. Drawing on the precedents and methods of Dyer, Pfeil and Morrison, the chapter has argued that representations are both symptomatic and constructive of discursive practice. In particular it has justified the emphasis on film representations based on an argument that, notwithstanding its intertextuality, film as a medium specifically operates on the senses to construct a mimetic experience and so has a particular power to produce subjects in discourse in any historical moment.

## **‘We’ll Always Have Paris’: Woody Allen’s Black and White Jewish Atlantic**

This chapter explores Woody Allen’s construction of an alternative, critical Jewish Atlantic paradigm in three films which critique the post-Second World War conservative shift in Jewish-American intellectual and political culture. In the introduction to this project, it was noted that a conservative Jewish Atlantic, intent on preserving the assimilationist discourse of American identity, and its attendant post-Enlightenment hierarchies, was identified by Carol R. Smith, in an exploration of the work of Saul Bellow.<sup>92</sup> This chapter will explore the content of an alternative Jewish Atlantic, expressed overtly by Allen in the films under discussion. It will be argued that it is a discourse oppositional to that identified by Smith; that it expresses concerns over the politics of Jewish American paradigms at a key moment in their development, and that in constructing a counter-cultural Atlanticist discourse, it critiques and rejects hegemonic Atlantics. In support of this argument, the chapter provides a close analysis of three Woody Allen films of the 1970s: *Play It Again Sam* (US, 1972), *Annie Hall* (US, 1977) and *Manhattan* (US, 1979). Elements of this counter-cultural discourse can be identified not only in the films of Woody Allen, but also in the novels of Philip Roth and intertextual links between the work of these two figures are apparent: The Allen films reference Roth’s earlier novel, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969); and Roth’s later *American Pastoral* (1997) develops themes evident in *Play It Again Sam* (*Play It Again Sam*) and *Annie Hall*. In these works both Allen and Roth are concerned with interrogating the content of Jewish American identity and its relation to whiteness and blackness. Allen’s work crosses the borders of Jewish cultural production to engage with the Black Atlantic, most explicitly in his film *Manhattan*, which offers an intertextual dialogue with James Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1963), as part of a project, it will be argued, to construct an imaginative space in which to construct a radical, leftist, American

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<sup>92</sup> Carol R. Smith, (2001), op.cit.



identity. The Allen films chosen for discussion are significant texts for their contribution to the construction of a *critical* Jewish Atlantic paradigm, the content and politics of which will be explored via a close reading of each.

The Allen films deploy and subvert the generic conventions of romantic comedy in the service of this paradigm; stereotypes of Jewishness and signifiers of blackness and the holocaust are also incorporated in a sustained critique, not only of the increasingly discursively powerful Jewish Atlantic which gained momentum post-civil rights, but also of hegemonic white Atlanticism in the post-war era. That these two paradigms are overlapping and mutually reinforcing is a key assumption of the Allen films. It will be argued here that the performances of identities in these films offer meditations on Jewishness and its transatlantic articulations, and interrogate Jewish assimilationist narratives as colluding with white Atlantic hegemony. In critiquing and contesting the assimilationist Jewish Atlantic identified by Smith, the Allen films may be seen as playing an important part in the decentring and fragmenting of the privileged white Atlantic discourse identified in the previous chapter. Read as a thematic trilogy on questions of identity the films address a number of specific themes: the content of a Jewish Atlantic in relation to hegemonic WASP masculinity; Africanist presence in Jewish narratives of identity; the rightward trajectory of Jewish-American political culture; the concomitant construction of American identity as being produced in elective assimilation; 'bootstrap' narratives of white ethnicity, and narratives of white resentment. Though uneven in their treatment of these themes, the films explore and connect them within a framework of transatlantic triangulation to construct a particular, critical, version of a Jewish Atlantic. Via a central protagonist, the Allen films deploy a construction previously discussed in the introductory chapter, the idea of a border-crossing Jewish identity, and interrogate the politics of various crossings: from Europe to America; from East coast to West coast; from

Brooklyn to Manhattan. These spatial border crossings are explored as identity crossings via the central cipher of the filmic Woody Allen persona and a repertoire of characters who take up identity positions around the central protagonist. This configuration seems, initially, to offer an inversion of the archetypal ethnic revival narrative as outlined by Jacobson: A narrative featuring, as previously suggested, a cluster of positions in which whiteness is the central pole, available to be claimed or refused.<sup>93</sup> In the Allen films, however, the Jewish persona seems to displace whiteness at the centre; a radical departure in the 1970s from the Jewish ventriloquism of earlier decades.<sup>94</sup> Samantha Baskind has explored the idea that more recently the 'Jewish Jew' has become the default identity in American popular culture.<sup>95</sup> This claim, and its suggestion of a contemporary privileging of Jewish masculinity, reinforces arguments that whiteness, and white masculinity in particular, is no longer the privileged, default identity. However, the Allen films under discussion avoid a simple reverse discourse of this kind, in which one term in the binary hierarchy is substituted for another, to develop a more complex critique of the relation of Jewishness to whiteness. Allen's deployment of the *schlemiel* illustrates this point. Across the three films, Allen deploys a persona recognizably Jewish, but also hybrid. As it appears in *Play It Again Sam*, the persona is most readily identifiable as the *schlemiel*, a traditional Jewish archetype of a whining, inept, loser. In addition, commentators have noted its popular cinematic genealogy and hybridity, with influences from Groucho Marx and from Chaplin, and by the way in which Allen's dialogue and slapstick scenes reference Bob Hope's screen persona of WASP bungler.<sup>96</sup> However, it is tempting to suppose that Hope's persona was in fact Jewish in its roots, channeling the *shlemiel* in an era when Jewish comedy whether performed by non-Jews, or even when

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (1998), *Whiteness of A Different Colour: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Boston, Mass., Harvard University Press

<sup>94</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post Civil Rights America*, Cambridge Mass., London England, Harvard University Press

<sup>95</sup> Samantha Baskind, 'The Fockerized Jew?: Questioning Jewishness as Cool in American Popular Entertainment', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Volume 25, Number 4, Summer 2007: 3-17

<sup>96</sup> John Baxter (1999), *Woody Allen: A Biography*, New York, Carroll & Graf

performed by Jewish artists, was forced into acts of ventriloquism, such as the Marx brothers performing as undefined 'ethnics'.<sup>97</sup> A similar reading may be made of the Jack Lemmon character, C.C. Baxter, in Billy Wilder's film, *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, US, 1960) in which he is described by his Jewish neighbor as a *nebbish*. In contrast, some decades after both Hope and the Marx brothers, and a decade after Wilder's film, the Allen persona is openly signified as Jewish in various ways, which will be discussed. In *Play It Again Sam*, and *Annie Hall*, ventriloquism is refused and the *schlemiel*, who is now, via visual representation in film, self-evidently Jewish, speaks. In *Play It Again Sam*, Allen's character, Allan Felix, voices his internal monologue. Less in evidence in *Annie Hall*, the *schlemiel* appears sparingly, as Allan/Alvy Singer now speaks directly, literally in direct address to the audience, but also figuratively, naming his Jewishness, further suggesting his potential transformation into the default identity. Nevertheless, the *schlemiel* is a figure of abjection. Naming and speaking, therefore, are not necessarily indicative of a direct movement of Jewishness from margin to centre. However, his Jewishness now no longer invisible, the use of the *schlemiel* may be read as a strategy of smuggling, his uses analogous to the uses of camp in the representation of gay men: an exaggerated performance of hyper-visibility, which, by comic exaggeration, neuters, but also makes possible, the smuggling in of visible Jewishness for mainstream consumption. As the character's Jewish identity is validated in *Play It Again Sam*, the *schlemiel* is gradually cast off. By *Manhattan*, the *schlemiel* is all but erased and Jewish masculine subjectivity is established. However, the generic conventions of (white) romantic comedy require that the (white) heterosexual lovers are united at the end.<sup>98</sup> In each of the Allen films the protagonist remains finally alone, ultimately undermining aspirations to be the default identity, as the conventional masculine subject of the genre. Exposing the whiteness of

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<sup>97</sup> Nicholas Sammond & Chandra Mukerji, ' "What you are ... I wouldn't eat": Ethnicity, Whiteness, and Performing 'the Jew' in Hollywood's Golden Age', in Daniel Bernardi, (ed) *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001

<sup>98</sup> Richard Dyer (1993), *The Matter of Images*, London, Routledge

the genre by sabotaging it is one of the ways the Allen films resist an easy slippage from Jewish marginality to privilege, and instead maintain a critical stance towards privileging any identity.

Jacobson has located Allen's work, *Annie Hall* in particular, as emerging out of, and expressing themes of ethnic revival in the 1970s: a distinct brand of Ellis Island whiteness,<sup>99</sup> which Jacobson argues has developed concomitant racialised 'bootstrap' and white ethnic grievance narratives. However, it will be argued here that, if the Allen films resist assimilation into privileged whiteness, nor can they be subsumed under the rubrics of ethnic revivalism or Ellis Island whiteness. Rather they express ambivalence towards the meanings and uses of ethnic revival and its relationship to whiteness, blackness and transatlantic culture, maintaining, on the one hand, the original impetus of ethnic revivalism in which whiteness itself is the problematical identity, while on the other, distancing Jewish identities from the ethnic revivalist turn to narratives of white grievance. In the post-civil rights and ethnic revival context of their production, *Play It Again Sam*, *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* express anxiety about the content of a Jewish identity which has become relational and mutable. The version of Jewish identity they articulate is one which resonates with and addresses these ontological insecurities.

Initially, in *Play It Again Sam*, Allen plays the *schlemiel* as neurotic, Jewish, film critic Allan Felix who struggles to assert his identity in the face of the discursive power of privileged constructions of masculinity, disseminated to a mass audience by Hollywood and represented in the film via the sign of Humphrey Bogart, whom Felix imagines as his spirit guide. *Play It Again Sam* references the *ur-text* of *Casablanca* to exemplify the appeal of Bogart as Rick. However, though Bogart functions in the later film as a signifier of racial

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<sup>99</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, (2006) op.cit

and gender identities, neither of these signs are univalent. It was suggested in the previous chapter that in *Casablanca*, urbane sophisticated Rick is hybridized and creolized via the Africanist presence of Sam (Dooley Wilson) as Rick's spirit guide, and may be read as a Jewish Atlantic figure. Bogart's presence in *Play It Again Sam* is, however, a fractured one, since it is not only the Bogart of Rick in *Casablanca* who inhabits Felix's imagination, but the Bogart of Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). Bogart as Spade, in contrast to Bogart as Rick, is deployed in *Play It Again Sam* as the sign of uncompromised white masculinity via a persona featured frequently in *films noirs* of the 1940 and 50s. It is only in the final scene, when Allen/Allan Felix is no longer in thrall to the hegemonic white masculinity of Bogart/Spade that he can realise his own potential to be the equal of the idealized Bogart/Rick image.

The choice of the Bogart/Spade image is a choice of a particular kind of masculinity, significant as a representation of a patriarchal, white, masculinity which has mastery over both women and other men. In the world of threats depicted in the *noir* genre, the stability and ontological security of white, middle-class masculinity, was frequently represented as besieged by the tempting, but dangerous, *femme fatale*. Unlike other *noir* protagonists, the Bogart persona always succeeds in overcoming the threat: compare Bogart's/Spade's final resistance to the sexual predator Brigid O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor) in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, US, 1941) with the fate of Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) in *Double Indemnity*, (Billy Wilder, US, 1944), whose weakness in the face of the *femme fatale* Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) leads to his downfall. In *The Maltese Falcon*, not only does Spade gain mastery over Astor/O'Shaughnessy, but also over his own desire for her. In the process, he gains control of the eponymous statuette which Astor/O'Shaughnessy and Others – non-American or non-heterosexual or both – desire. The racialised and phallic symbolism of the black bird is apparent. In Lacanian terms, the

quest for it suggests its potency and taps into longstanding discourses about blackness and sexuality. It is Spade who gains possession of it, while O'Shaughnessy's, and Others', desire for it is thwarted. Their transgressions combine miscegenatory desires and a wish for power. Spade contains these threats and in the film's economy of signs, Spade's white masculine hegemony is not only recuperated, but is enhanced by mastery of the potent, black phallus. Bogart's masculinity, then, ultimately has self-control, regains ontological security, by succeeding in overcoming the threat of female power and containing the threat of hybridity.

In *Play It Again Sam*, a number of readings are made possible both by its discursive positioning in relation to *Casablanca*, and by the positioning of Allen/Allan Felix in relation to Bogart's performance of Spade. Outside the stylised genres of the 1940s, the Bogey spirit guide of *Play It Again Sam* now displays a displaced hyper-masculinity which is parodic. The Bogart figure declares, 'Dames are simple', and via this persona hegemonic masculinity is represented as one in which men control women with violence - 'a slug from a 45'. In *Play It Again Sam*, Allen's/Allan's friend, and real life guide, Dick Christie, is a 1970s version of Bogart's /Spade's uber-masculine identity. For Dick, emotions are distanced and disavowed and interpersonal relationships are expressed in the language of financial transactions. Allen's/Allan's masculine identity is, initially, constructed as Other to this default identity. 'Why can't I be cool?' Allen/Allan laments after another cinema viewing of *Casablanca* – cool like Bogey is the inference as the camera pans to include a poster for *Across the Pacific* (1942). However, rather than being 'cool' Dyer has suggested that Bogey's masculinity is 'hysterical'<sup>100</sup>, reinforced in visual representations by a *mise-en-scene* and props of masculinity. Dick Christie displays a similar hysterical

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<sup>100</sup> Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-Up', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, London, Routledge, 1992: 267

masculinity, but the props have become the phone, the briefcase, the suit, and the language is that of the cash nexus.

The relation of Jewishness to whiteness is a major preoccupation of *Play It Again Sam*. The idea that American whiteness is problematical is signified early on in a scene when Allen's/Allan's nordically blonde, blue-eyed wife, Nancy, leaves him. She wears a T-shirt emblazoned with the Stars and Stripes and Allen/Allan imagines her leaving him for a similarly Nordic-blond man:

Nancy: It's been so long since I've been made love to by a handsome blond man.

Allan: We're divorced two weeks and she's dating a Nazi.

The theme of American whiteness, and in particular America's/Spade's white hyper-masculinity, as oppressive, is developed in a scene when Allen/Allan goes to a bar with a new date. The trope of extreme whiteness is invoked when the couple is harassed by three white toughs with tattoos, wearing leathers. Allen/Allan marks his difference from them: 'I have to get up early... Go to temple. It's my people's Sabbath', and so marks a difference between civilised Jewish (middle-class) masculinity and savage white (working-class) masculinity. The scene references earlier film texts in which brutalised white masculinity is the oppressive identity, in particular, the *noir* film *Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk, US, 1947), in which three World War II veterans murder a Jew after meeting him and a woman in bar. In *Play It Again Sam*, another aspect of the Bogart persona is deployed as Allan comments that his encounter with the toughs is 'like something from *The Petrified Forest*' (Archie Mayo, US, 1936). In this film Bogart plays Duke Mantee, a brutal, inarticulate killer on the run whose character is contrasted with the noble, British Alan Squier (Leslie Howard). The film is suffused with references to the rise of Nazism in Germany, and parallels are drawn between the Nazis and Duke Mantee and his gang.

This is one of a number of signifiers in *Play It Again Sam*, marking out a European humanism to which Americanness is opposed. A further example of this transatlantic opposition occurs when Allan has the following encounter in a gallery, moments after claiming Van Gogh as his favourite artist on the grounds that he allowed the power of emotions to direct his actions:

Allan: That's quite a lovely Jackson Pollock, isn't it?

Museum Girl: Yes, it is.

Allan: What does it say to you?

Museum Girl: It restates the negativeness of the universe. The hideous lonely emptiness of existence. Nothingness. The predicament of Man forced to live in a barren, Godless eternity like a tiny flame flickering in an immense void with nothing but waste, horror and degradation, forming a useless bleak straitjacket in a black absurd cosmos.

Allan: What are you doing Saturday night?

Museum Girl: Committing suicide.

Allan: What about Friday night?

The tone of the scene is parodic, as, on the one hand, Allen lampoons both critical responses to Pollock's work and on the other, ironises the romanticisation of Van Gogh. While the use of parody serves to undermine both of these rhetorics, at the same time, it acknowledges their cultural resonance; the use of parody, while it undermines its targets, alerts readers to the ubiquity and naturalisation of specific tropes. In parodying both, the scene offers a derisive critique of American political culture. American culture is represented via Pollock's Abstract Expressionism as empty, sterile and negative and is counterpointed with Van Gogh's European Expressionism, concerned with the expression of *something* – emotional response to experience. Abstract Expressionism, of which Pollock was lauded as the most influential exponent, was felt by critics to be America's first



distinctive contribution to modern art, and to rival European Modernism.<sup>101</sup> Understood as a departure from, and a dispensing with, the techniques and rationales of the European tradition the movement expressed existential themes of meaninglessness, alienation, and boredom. Allen satirises Existentialism's, and by implication, Abstract Expressionism's, potential for a drift into nihilism and individual disengagement. The gallery scene is suggestive that American art abstracted from a European heritage lacks meaning, affirming Allen's commitment to a particular transatlantic culture.

The scene may be read further as connecting Allen's transatlanticism with an ongoing leftist critique of Abstract Expressionism, firstly as the aesthetic expression of American hegemonic capitalism, and secondly, as funded and supported by the CIA, the State Department and the whole US government infrastructure. The latter accusation is part of a broader view, discussed in the introduction to this project, of the post-World War II influence of the CIA in transatlantic artistic and intellectual production to construct a Cold War anti-Communist hegemony. In this view, the CIA is linked to the funding of a number of influential intellectual magazines and journals in New York, Paris and London, a matter which will be returned to in the discussion of *Annie Hall*. Key to this project was the mobilisation of the New York Jewish Intellectuals and the development of a neo-conservative Jewish Atlantic.<sup>102</sup> Read from this perspective, the scene positions Allen /Allan against the neo-conservative, assimilationist, Jewish Atlantic, and for an alternative transatlantic culture exemplified in Van Gogh's empathic and socialist leanings. The construction of Abstract Expressionism as representing sterility and nothingness makes it available as a useful signifier of an empty, white, American oppressiveness, its ability to appear to be nothing, as explored in the introduction, a major source of its power.

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<sup>101</sup> Douglas Tallack, *Twentieth –Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context*, New York Longman, 1991

<sup>102</sup> Nathan Abrams, 'A Profoundly Hegemonic Moment: De-Mythologizing the Cold War New York Jewish Intellectuals', in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* - Volume 21, Number 3, Spring 2003: 64-82

By the end of *Play It Again Sam*, Allen/Allan rejects Sam Spade's Bogey and Dick as spirit guides. With Rick's Bogey the ending is somewhat different. The two Bogart's signify two versions of American identity, with Rick taking the part of a hybrid, transatlantic, America. Allan no longer needs Rick's Bogey either, because he has appropriated aspects of Rick for the construction of his own identity; he has developed a style of his own. The ending may suggest a reading of *Play It Again Sam* as an expression of the decentring of white masculinity, discussed by Jacobson,<sup>103</sup> such that white ethnicity becomes the default white identity. However, a reading of *Play It Again Sam* as an example of an ethnic revival text is undercut by Allen's/Allan's refusal to identify as white. The deployment of blackness in *Play It Again Sam* is not, it seems, in order to secure Allen's/Allan's American whiteness but in furtherance of its refusal. In a scene which illustrates the theme of Jews as somewhere between white and black, and between European and American, Allen/Allan prepares for a date. He is anxious to make an impression but can not decide whether he should have Oscar Peterson or Bartok playing when the woman arrives. The alternatives suggest indecision about whether to be North American or European; to be identified with blackness or with whiteness, even as they suggest an equivalence in cultural prestige. The moment signifies a resistance to assimilation to whiteness and to a straightforward displacement of WASP-ness as the default identity, a choice which involves the abandonment of identification with blackness. The solution offered by Diane Keaton/Linda Christie allows him to not finally choose either, or to choose both, further suggesting the richer possibilities of a transatlantic, and racially hybrid, sensibility.

In *Annie Hall*, the politics of whiteness, blackness and Atlantic paradigms are made more explicit. The shifting political culture of the New York intellectuals is a major theme contextualising and framing the politics of *Annie Hall*, and later, *Manhattan*. It is the

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<sup>103</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), op.cit.

movement away from a particularistic Jewish identity by the New York Jewish Intellectuals which is critiqued in *Annie Hall* as elitist and conservative. In this particular, *Annie Hall* can be seen as reflecting some of the concerns of ethnic revival. However, as will be argued, in other ideological respects it diverges significantly from those concerns. In *Annie Hall*, Allen uses the construct of a border crossing identity, as the protagonist, stand-up comedian Alvy Singer, searches for a usable identity. Although this is a theme at one with the cultural zeitgeist of the seventies ethnic revival, Alvy's journey differs in some important respects from the mainstream of ethnic revival narratives. The film suggests, in any case, that border-crossing is not unique to Jews; when Alvy meets Annie Hall, a WASP of uncompromised whiteness, she too is searching for a usable identity.

*Annie Hall* opens with Allen, as Alvy Singer, in direct address to the camera. In the opening monologue he constructs his own particularistic Jewishness by referencing the Catskills, Groucho Marx, and Freud. At the same time, these references are located in distinct and differentiated Jewish traditions, raising immediately the question of what the content of a Jewish identity might be. A number of scenes serve to locate Allen/Alvy in relation to ethnic revivalism, whiteness, blackness and 'bootstrap narratives'. In a scene which parodies Norman Podhoretz's writing about his early life in Brooklyn, we're taken back to Alvy's schooldays where Alvy sits in on his old class mates and teachers. The school, in working-class Brooklyn, is populated by a variety of what Jacobson refers to as white ethnics and, Alvy tells us, had the worst teachers. The classroom scene undermines the notion of innate Jewish intellectualism; the dumbest kid in the class was Jewish Ivan Ackerman: 'Always the wrong answer!' says Alvy. In a parodic invocation of Norman Podhoretz's arguments in his controversial 1963 essay for *Commentary*, the scene also debunks the notion of Jews as always middle-class and always rich.<sup>104</sup> Podhoretz argued

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<sup>104</sup> Norman Podhoretz, 'My Negro Problem - And Ours', *Commentary*, Feb, 1963: 35

that when he was growing up in Brooklyn, all the Jews he knew were poor, and that it was difficult to see how blacks could be more disadvantaged:

For a long time I was puzzled to think that Jews were supposed to be rich when the only Jews I knew were poor, and that negroes were supposed to be persecuted when it was the Negroes who were doing the only persecuting I knew about - and doing it moreover to *me*... The Negroes were tougher than we were, more ruthless, and on the whole, they were better athletes. What could it mean then, to say they were badly off and that we were more fortunate?<sup>105</sup>

Podhoretz's essay can be interpreted as an early contribution, *avant le lettre*, to the post-civil rights backlash, as well as being suggestive of what Jacobson has called 'bootstrap' ethnicity. It seems to draw its sense of legitimacy from a reading of a scene in Baldwin's *Another Country*, published in the same year. In the novel, the relatively privileged white sons of 'bohemian' artists, Richard and Cassie are attacked by black youths in their multi-ethnic neighbourhood. Baldwin uses the incident to expose, amongst other things, the underlying racism of apparently liberal characters, and in the novel the complexities of racial hatreds and envy are developed. Podhoretz dispenses with this depth of understanding. In referring back to his own experiences he positions his youthful Jewish self as oppressed by powerful, physically potent black masculinity, tapping into longstanding discursive fears of black bodies.

*Annie Hall*'s classroom scene may seem to locate Allen/Alvy within the narrative of white ethnic revival, present in Podhoretz's essay, as underdog and persecuted. However, in a later scene, Allen distances Alvy from this narrative. Waiting for Annie outside the cinema he is approached by two men for his autograph. Alvy is wearing a guerrilla jacket of the sort worn by communist revolutionaries such as Castro, Che Guevara etc. and frequently favoured by socialists of the 1970s and 80s as a sign of their political allegiance, thus

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<sup>105</sup> Norman Podhoretz, op.cit

visually signifying Alvy's New Left politics. The autograph hunters are large and overly enthusiastic in a childlike way. Loud in their appreciation they tower over Alvy, seeming to surround and suffocate him. The men are portrayed to be reminiscent of images at the lower end of racial hierarchies, as seen in nineteenth century visual depictions of the 'races' <sup>106</sup> which were promulgated with the development of scientific racism. Heavy browed, with prominent 'prehistoric' jaw lines, their speech mimics the style and register of Stallone in *Rocky*, their skin tone is dark, and their stance is ape-like. Alvy is annoyed at being prey to the attentions of the 'cast of *The Godfather*' or 'two guys named Cheech'. Visibly uncomfortable, Alvy asks them whether this is a meeting of the Teamsters. The scene may be read as an attack on the 'white' multi-ethnic union, the Teamsters. The union, led by Jimmy Hoffa, had mafia connections and was implicated in organized crime. In addition, the union was a defendant in a case alleging that their discriminatory practices towards 'negroes' and 'Spanish-surnamed' workers contravened the Civil Rights Act, 1964. Alvy's question, when he is hemmed in by the autograph hunters, hints at the Teamsters' intimidatory tactics and their corruption. It seems at this point that Allen is marking out his difference from white ethnics, and his distance from the Teamsters and the narrative of white ethnic grievance.

If *Annie Hall* is not a straightforward narrative of white ethnic grievance, then nor is it a straightforward rejection of ethnic revival, as suggested by a further scene. In a cinema queue, Alvy is irritated by a WASP-ish looking man behind him. The man pontificates loudly about Fellini, Beckett and Marshall McLuhan to the woman he is with. 'He's screaming his opinions in my ear!', and, 'He's spitting on my neck' complains Alvy. He suggests that the couple probably met after the man placed an ad in the New York Review of Books: 'Thirty-ish academic wishes to meet woman who's interested in Mozart, James Joyce and sodomy.' Alvy suggests that the WASP knows nothing, at which both step out

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<sup>106</sup> Josiah Clark Nott & George Robins Gliddon, *Indigenous Races of the Earth*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1857

of the queue, and the WASP claims that since he teaches a course at Columbia his views have validity. Alvy then produces the real Marshall McLuhan from behind a poster screen to tell the WASP, 'You know nothing of my work'. 'Boy! If life were only like that', wishes Alvy. On one level, this encounter serves the purpose of distancing Alvy from WASP whiteness and assimilation, just as the previous encounter distanced him from the white ethnic revival, revisiting themes from *Play It Again Sam*. On another it specifically targets Columbia, puncturing its claims to validity. Columbia, once a WASPs-only Ivy League college, is targeted as an institution for a number of reasons, not least as the fulcrum of the shift rightwards in Jewish intellectual thought, begun by Lionel Trilling and passed on through Norman Podhoretz, Irving Howe and others after Columbia began admitting certain Jews: predominantly those from families of German origin who immigrated before the mass immigration of Ellis Island Jews from Eastern Europe. The WASP in the cinema is representative of Columbia, which became infamous in leftist circles after 1968 after a New Left student protest which was concerned with the College doing research on behalf of the Pentagon, and with its expansion into Harlem, negatively impacting on the homes of black residents. The College called in the police to break up the protest, and students were physically assaulted and arrested. Allen's/Alvy's attack on the professor is a not so veiled attack on Columbia as an institution and on the role of right-wing Jewish intellectuals in its political direction. It is a further indictment in Allen's critique of Jewish assimilationism.

The encounters with the 'Teamsters' and the Columbia academic are also suggestive of encounters between different versions of masculinity, again revisiting a theme explored in *Play It Again Sam*. However this time it is not Hollywood constructions of white masculinity and their discursive power which is at stake. Rather, the way in which both the white ethnics and the WASP-ish academic are louder than Alvy, makes a comment on

both the ethnic revival and WASP whiteness. It is suggestive of their sense of entitlement and uncomplicated relation to masculine assumptions of power and the right to be heard. The relation of Jewish masculinity, in the form of Alvy, to both of these identities, and their assumptions of power, is one of both marginality and refusal.

In a series of vignettes, Allen's/Alvy's position in relation to the Jewish cultures and identities at his disposal is problematised. In an early sequence we see Alvy's mother haranguing him about 'fitting in'. He has been taken to see the doctor because he is not conforming to his mother's academic expectations. His mother, a controlling figure, complains 'You were always out of step'; out of step with the Old World, lower middle-class, Jewish culture of his parents' and grandparents' generation, the scene suggests. He is not doing his homework because the Universe is expanding, so there is no point. The condescending doctor 'reassures' him that Brooklyn isn't expanding - confirming Alvy's sense of Brooklyn as Old World and parochial. Yet if Alvy wants to escape the culture of the old ghetto, he is not attracted to the postmodern, assimilationist, world on offer; a theme that will be returned to.

Echoing Roth's psychosexual framing device, *Annie Hall* uses gender to articulate Alvy's problematic relation to Jewishness in terms of interpersonal relationships. The versions of Jewish identity at Alvy's disposal are represented via not only his mother, but also other Jewish women. However, if Alvy is understood as standing for a Jewishness which is in Hall's terminology, always becoming, then Alvy's relationships with his mother, and his wives, are moments in which Alvy's, and New York Jewish, identity, is clearly delineated. Each relationship stands for a moment in the relation of Jewishness to whiteness, and each marks a shift in that relation. Alvy's first wife, Allison Portchnik, is a PhD student

doing her thesis on Political Commitment in Twentieth Century Literature. They meet at a rally for Adlai Stevenson:

Alvy:            You're like, New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual,  
                     Central Park West, Brandeis University, the socialist summer  
                     camps and the, the... father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right?  
                     And the really, y'know, strike-oriented kind of, red diaper? Stop  
                     me, before I make a complete imbecile of myself.

Allison:        No, that was wonderful. I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype.

Alvy:            Right, I'm a bigot, I know, but for the left.

Allison is constructed as a particular version of Jewish identity: well-meaning, middle-class, socialist, academic but politically naive. In a scene when Alvy is obsessing over the assassination of JFK and endorsing the cover-up theory, she is doubtful that Earl Warren, LBJ, the FBI, the CIA, J. Edgar Hoover and the oil companies, all representative of the white-American establishment, could *all* be involved in a cover-up. The effect of the scene is ambiguous: Alvy's behavior *is* obsessive and suggests conspiracy theory paranoia, and yet Allison's dismissal of it suggests her credulousness. The scene's ambiguity leaves open the possibility that Alvy's suspicions are not just paranoid delusions. Alvy's second wife, Robin, is wrapped up in the world of the New York Jewish Intellectuals and a culture of fawning over the 'academic as celebrity'. She is made to stand for an aspirational Jewish identity which seeks integration into the elite, conservative, transatlantic Establishment. The scene offers a further attack on the New York Jewish Intellectuals and their rightward shift. We see Alvy and Robin at a cocktail party where the guests include Chairs in History at Princeton and Philosophy at Cornell. Robin is concerned to make a good impression, while Alvy wants to find a TV to watch a basketball game. She can not understand why he is attracted to the game; because it is physical, he explains. The scene sets up an opposition between the cerebral and the visceral, a theme explored later



in more depth in *Manhattan*, but which here suggests that exclusion of the physical is a deficiency in intellectual understanding of experience. Alvy is scathing about *Commentary*:

Alvy: I'm so tired of spending evenings making fake insights with people who work for *Dysentery*.

Robin: *Commentary*.

Alvy: Oh really? I had heard that *Commentary* and *Dissent* had merged and formed *Dysentery*.

Alvy's contempt for *Dissent* and *Commentary*, edited, respectively, for many years by Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz, once more positions Alvy against their political shift to the right and needs to be understood in the context of the shift rightward of the 'little' magazines, as they were known. Along with *Partisan Review* and *Scrutiny*, the magazines emerged in New York and London, and were inextricably intertwined with the transatlantic rise in cultural and political influence of the New York Jewish intellectual movement. In 1953, Irving Kristol had moved from being editor of New York based *Commentary*, to London based *Encounter*; the latter now known to have been financed by the CIA.<sup>107</sup> From once being on the left in the 1930s, the magazines, their editors and contributors had increasingly moved to the right. By the 1970s they were instrumental in the construction of the neo-conservative agenda and had sided with Columbia in the student protests. A key element of their agenda was opposition towards affirmative action programmes. Allen's critique of the political trajectory of the New York Jewish Intellectuals is indicative of disillusion with the political potential of a Jewish identity which has allied itself with privileged whiteness to be instrumental in securing a neo-conservative transatlantic hegemony.

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<sup>107</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders (2000), *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, New York, The New Press

When Alvy first meets Annie, a WASP of uncompromised whiteness, he is initially arrogant and defensive, even hostile. His wariness has been anticipated in earlier conversations with his writing partner Max:

Alvy: I distinctly heard it. He muttered under his breath, 'Jew!'

Max: You're crazy.

Alvy: No, I'm not. We were walking off the tennis court and, you know, he was there, and me and his wife...and he looked at her, then they both looked at me, and under his breath he said, 'Jew!'

The suggestion is, that although Jews may now be allowed to join the tennis club, that doesn't mean that anti-Semitism is erased; assimilation, is, it seems never secure. Alvy's guardedness on first meeting Annie is thus contextualised. Superficially, the attraction between the two seems to be one of opposites. It may have recalled for contemporary audiences Alex Portnoy's obsessive but hostile desire for *shiksas*. Annie's whiteness is signified as guaranteed in a number of ways. He asks her if she grew up in a Norman Rockwell painting, again referencing Portnoy, and suggesting her quintessential small town mid-Americanness. She is from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, a signifier of white, middle-America, and less self-evidently of historical white Euro-American expansion. Annie's skin shimmers in the natural light of her apartment and in particular the lighting gives her a shiny, apple cheeked appearance, enhancing a naïve, childish healthy look. Later, Alvy will comment on how well, how 'American', Annie's family look: for American, we may also read 'white', suggesting, in comparison, like Allan in *Play It Again Sam*, Alvy's non-whiteness. Annie's and Alvy's cultural and historical differences are articulated rapidly. He references, as if joking, a grandmother raped by Cossacks; she tells the story of Uncle George, shell-shocked in World War One. Allen is at pains to stress Annie's

equal interest in Alvy as exotic, or representing difference from her previous experience: 'Well, You're what Grammy Hall would call a *real* Jew!', she announces. Alvy's expression conveys hurt, surprise and uncertainty about what to make of this naming. He looks away, but recovers himself, and says, 'Thank you'. 'Yeah, well', Annie goes on, 'she hates Jews... She thinks they just make money, but let me tell you, she is the one, is she ever, I'm telling you'. The moment recalls Alvy's experience on the tennis court and there follows an uncomfortable silence broken by Alvy asking Annie about her photography. This is a significant choice of topic, as the development of photography was a catalyst for debates about the purpose and definition of art and the emergence of modernist criticism, a theme which Allen pursues further in *Manhattan*, but which here is inserted almost casually. Their conversation about photography and aesthetics is stilted and self-conscious as they try to paper over Annie's comments. Added subtitles decode their speech, emphasising the potential for their misreading of each other. The scene offers further layers of meaning, which develop when he pulls from her shelf a copy of *The Bell Jar* (1963), Sylvia Plath's critique of the 1950s, white, bourgeois, cult of femininity. The reference to Plath in *Annie Hall* is richly suggestive. It provides a context for Annie's comment about Alvy being a real Jew, suggesting perhaps feelings of empathy, even envy, and desires to transform her own identity; that Alvy may be a surrogate for these emotions. Alvy explains to Annie that Plath's tragic suicide was understood as romantic by the 'College girl mentality'. The inference is that Annie shares this 'mentality' and has not understood Plath's work. Alvy's implied criticism may suggest, ironically, on the one hand, that Annie therefore does not understand Plath's articulation of the suffocating effects of gender oppression. Less ironically, it may also suggest an inability on her part to understand the experience of being a Jew and Alvy's rejection of the role of surrogate.

Their first meeting expresses the opportunities for their mutual misrecognition behind veils of ethnic and gender difference. Her cross-dressing in baggy trousers, spotted tie, white shirt and waistcoat references traditional masculine bourgeois styles, and like the reference to her Uncle George, locate her culturally and ethnically, but also signify that in terms of gender she remains a subaltern, as the clothes do not quite fit. The weight of a particular American narrative of tradition, white, patriarchal, anti-Semitic, which bears down upon Annie, is revealed in the family photographs which dominate a wall of her apartment. That she is struggling to escape the constraints of this narrative is suggested by her possession of Plath and the wearing of clothes which are 'not hers'. This reading suggests that Alvy's and Annie's attraction is represented as not simply one of exoticised difference, nor, as with Portnoy, a desire on the part of Alvy to conquer whiteness<sup>108</sup>, but is in part to do with their sameness, in their desire to escape exclusive identities, not only of ethnicity, but gender too

Of the scene when Annie has brought Alvy to Easter dinner at her parents, more than one writer has observed that the Hall family's conversation is 'reserved to the point of strangulation'.<sup>109</sup> In split screen, the Halls and the Singers are juxtaposed, the latter cacophonous and animated compared with the Halls. The Halls, Alvy comments, "Really look American, so healthy, like they never get sick, nothing like my family'. Their talk is of inconsequential: swap meets and how good the ham is, the latter immediately demonstrating their cultural insensitivity. In contrast, at the Singer table, the talk is at the other extreme, of diabetes and coronaries. The flat delivery, but prescriptive content of the Hall's conversation once again speaks of an empty, but nevertheless oppressive whiteness. The scene references Roth; once again, in suggesting these differences are not only those of ethnicity, but also of class; in *Portnoy's Complaint*, for example, Portnoy

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<sup>108</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), op.cit.

<sup>109</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), op.cit.: 126; Peter J.Bailey (2001), *The Reluctant Film Art of Woody Allen*, Lexington, Kentucky

senior's health is expended in the service of his aristocratic WASP employers. In *Annie Hall*, the inference is that Alvy's family get sicker because their lives are harder. However, the Halls' appearance of health is deceptive. Annie's brother, Duane, reveals to Alvy his suicidal fantasies of driving into the oncoming traffic on the motorway; such fantasies of self-destruction represented as psychotic. Duane's character draws once more on the trope of extreme whiteness, which it has been suggested elsewhere in this project, generally leaves 'ordinary everyday' whiteness undisturbed. However, Allen is at pains to indict 'ordinary everyday' whiteness too. Under Grammy Hall's gaze, Alvy is transformed into a Hasidic Orthodox Jew, as both Jacobson and Bailey note.<sup>110</sup> However, Allen returns the gaze, and under Allen/Alvy's gaze *she* becomes a version of extreme whiteness – 'a Nazi!' - Alvy tells us - right in the heart of middle-America. The moment suggests that the apparent distance between extreme and ordinary, everyday, whiteness may not exist. It rejects assimilationism, suggesting that whiteness is not an identity to aspire to, anticipating Michael Lerner's view, that Jewish amnesia would be needed for Jews to be white.<sup>111</sup>

Annie's desire to transcend whiteness involves her in a version of minstrelsy without blackface; a racial ventriloquism. Having, apparently no ethnicity, other than WASP, to fall back on, she can only reject default whiteness via an adoption of its Others. Annie's apparent lack of an ethnic repertoire from which to create an identity speaks once again of the idea of whiteness as empty. Via her singing, Annie tries on Other identities, singing an old Jewish-penned standard, made famous by Dooley Wilson in *Casablanca*. Annie's ventriloquism suggests her identification with historically oppressed identities of Jewishness and blackness, musically represented here as hybrid, and serves to ground

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<sup>110</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *ibid*: 126; Peter J. Bailey, *ibid*.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Lerner, 'Jews Are Not White', *The Village Voice*, May 18, 1993: 33

New York as a site of musical hybridity and cultural exchange, a theme which recurs in *Manhattan* and which is central to the construction of Allen's alternative Jewish Atlantic.

In furtherance of Allen's project, a particular transatlantic triangulation is deployed. Allen both utilises and inverts a set of polarities previously constructed to articulate difference between the New World and the Old; between America and Europe. The narrative of opposing polarities was perhaps given fullest expression by Henry James, in such novels as *The American* (1877) and *The Europeans* (1878). A century later, it was deployed, in a more nuanced triangulation, by James Baldwin in *Another Country* (1963). James's Atlantic paradigm contrasted European hedonism with American asceticism; urbanity with gaucheness; refinement with coarseness; permissiveness with proscription; guile with innocence; depth with surface. For Baldwin the opposition was one between self-determination and prohibition; freedom and limitation. However, for Baldwin, in *Another Country*, these polarities are open to inversion in a complex triangulation in which Europe and America are not fixed constructions. The content of Europe and America as imagined spaces is interwoven with the characters' states of mind, which in turn have been historically produced in discourses about race, sexuality and belonging. The affinities and disparities between James's and Baldwin's Atlantic paradigms are worthy of further interrogation. An exploration of the connections between both James's<sup>112</sup> and Baldwin's<sup>113</sup> relation to modernism may shed further light on their transatlanticisms, however such a study would be beyond the scope of this project. In *Annie Hall*, Allen engages in a dialogue with both James's and Baldwin's Atlantics and constructs a reformulated Atlantic, via complex triangulation, in which both Europe and America are not only sites of oppression, but also of resistance to it. Allen applies his triangulated transatlantic trope in

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<sup>112</sup> Raphaël Ingelbien, 'Reversed Positions: Henry James, Realism, and Sexual Passion' in *The Henry James Review*, Volume 21, Number 1, Winter 2000: 63-71

<sup>113</sup> Cyraïna E. Johnson-Roullier, '(An)Other Modernism: James Baldwin, Giovanni's Room, and the Rhetoric of Flight', *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 45, Number 4, Winter 1999: 932-956

a critique of the neo-conservative trajectory of American culture and politics. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy takes Annie to see the film, *The Sorrow and the Pity* (Marcel Ophuls, US release, 1972). This film is a recurring motif and is used, it seems, to contrast historical Jewish persecution with the relatively privileged status of the NYJI culture. It undermines the narrative of elective migration which is part of the conservative Jewish Atlantic assimilation project, present in Podhoretz's memoir and identified in Bellow's work, for example, and which serves to distance Jewishness from blackness. It also offers a reminder of resistance. In *Annie Hall*'s economy of signs, Allen's use of *The Sorrow and the Pity* may be read as a call for a return to the leftist, transatlantic politics which shaped pre-war New York Jewish political culture, in order to resist the transatlantic neo-conservative project.

Allen's call for a return to the original ethos of New York leftist Jewish politics is reinforced by the use of an East Coast/ West Coast binarism, the form of which echoes Jamesian constructions of Europe/America, Old World/New World oppositions. In *Annie Hall*, LA is presented as shallow, compared with the depth of New York; in LA, political engagement has been replaced by consumption. LA is represented as a space of instant gratification and narcissism while New York, it is suggested, represents an alternative sensibility, of individual effort. For Allen, LA is the space of a postmodern continuous present in which events of history have no meaning because they are given no context, and traditional hierarchies are collapsed. This is, perhaps, the source of its appeal for Annie, struggling to escape tradition. Annie, and Alvy's friend, Max, each tell Alvy that New York is a dying city; that the future is in LA. Alvy rejects this idea, and Annie moves to LA to be with her new lover, Tony. From Alvy's perspective, LA's collapsing of hierarchies inevitably leads to political relativism. In contrast, New York is represented as a space of modernity, holding on to absolute values. This theme is pursued in *Manhattan* and will be returned to shortly.

The account of LA in *Annie Hall* links to Allen's earlier critique of Hollywood power in *Play It Again Sam*, and also to what Rogin terms the shameful past of white and Jewish blackface performance. The break-up between Alvy and Annie, and her move to LA and to Tony Lacey, may be seen a metaphor for the divergent political directions of East and West Coasts, left and right Jewish traditions: that between a critical New Left, transatlantic, culture, represented by Alvy on one hand, and an interchangeably white and Jewish, assimilationist culture, represented by Annie and her new lover, Tony, on the other. Alvy, previously supportive of her singing, now disavows her performance of blackness as minstrelsy; his response changes when its meaning seems to change. When he discovers she is reading William Buckley, and finds black soap in her bathroom he asks: 'What, are you joining a minstrel show?' Alvy's comment serves as both reminder and critique of blackface minstrelsy in transatlantic popular culture... By its representation in the figure of Annie, blackface appears to be restored to its transatlantic origins in WASP culture,<sup>114</sup> predating the mass migration of Ellis Island Jews to America. However, it also reminds the audience of the history of Jewish blackface performers and its most famous exponents of the 'twenties and 'thirties, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor. In a complex argument, to which there is not space to do justice here, Rogin argues that blacking up, in a tradition already long established in (white) popular culture, constructed Jolson, and therefore other Jews as white. In a syncretic interweaving of European, Jewish, popular and high cultural forms, with forms derived from black folk and white popular culture, to produce for example *My Mammy*, Jolson becomes, in blackface, a generic white person, expunged of a particularistic ethnicity; from European Jew to the default American identity.<sup>115</sup> The reference to blackface in *Annie Hall*, and by implication its Hollywood manifestations, implicates the characters of Annie, Max and Tony Lacey and their moves West, in the

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Rogin, op.cit.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Rogin, op.cit.



search for a generic white, American, identity. Assimilation, understood as shedding an identity of Jewish particularity of European origin, is an aspiration rejected by Allen.

The return to Brooklyn to revisit Alvy's old home crystallises a number of themes. As in the earlier return to Alvy's school, the narrative device is used whereby Alvy, Annie and Max, unseen, look in on Alvy's family as they were in the 1940s. In the first vignette, Alvy's parents are arguing about the cleaning woman stealing from them:

Dad:            You fired the cleaning woman?

Mum:           She was stealing!

Dad:            She's a coloured woman from Harlem; she's got a right to steal from us!

'They're both crazy', comments Alvy. The second vignette shows a family party, with Aunt Tessie showing why she was the 'life of the ghetto', to the amusement of Alvy and friends. These representations serve a number of purposes. Taken together they represent the New York Jewish experience as a comfortable one by the nineteen-forties, and comfortable enough to employ a cleaner. It illustrates the privileged economic status of Jews in relation to blacks. This places *Annie Hall* in opposition to contemporary narratives of white ethnic grievance, in which the predominant images are of the ghetto past as impoverished and dirty. It may suggest once again perhaps that the Jewish experience is particularistic, or it may suggest the partiality of the recycled ghetto imagery drawn from Riis, Himes others.<sup>116</sup> Alvy's father's Proudhon-ish - and Emersonian - arguments are emblematic of an earlier transatlantically informed New York Jewish political sensibility, while his mother's arguments fit more readily into the later rightist discourse exemplified by the post-civil rights position of Podhoretz, Howe et al. The scene is suggestive that political tension between competing discourses of Jewish political culture, and what the

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<sup>116</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), op.cit.

position should be regarding blackness and civil rights, predate Podhoretz's essay. The deployment of blackness in this scene may not be to say anything about black experience, but rather once again, in Morrison's Africanist terms, to locate Jewishness, culturally and politically in interrogations of whiteness. However, since key elements in the 1970s discourses of the New York Jewish Intellectuals were opposition to affirmative action programmes and support for the construction of a post-civil rights conservative political culture, it may be argued that the relation of Jewishness to blackness, and vice versa, is an important question to address. Alvy's parents, though offering opposing political positions, both distance the Jewish experience of modernity from the black experience of modernity. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy's mother is made to stand in for the voice of the post-civil rights Jewish conservative discourse. *Annie Hall* suggests that the most influential voices of Jewish culture have turned from an empathic alliance with black civil rights to a narrative not far removed from the white victimisation narratives: that there is now no need for affirmative action. In the white ethnic grievance narratives there is an argument that since white ethnics have achieved social mobility without the benefit of affirmative action, then why should blacks or other people of colour have such benefits?<sup>117</sup> The cleaning woman scene in *Annie Hall* may be read as a response to this 'bootstrap' white ethnic narrative which is exemplified in Norman Podhoretz's autobiographical paean to the American Dream, *Making It*<sup>118</sup> Podhoretz writes, 'One of the longest journeys in the world is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan'. This journey is both a figurative and material one which involves upward mobility, and from Podhoretz's perspective, a move from a radical, leftist, political position to a neo-conservative one. Alvy Singer's father feels he is on the same geographical and upwardly mobile journey, however, he rejects Podhoretz's move to the right, by emphasising the inequity between Jews and blacks. Nevertheless, his questioning of who else she is going to steal from, suggests his positioning himself as

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<sup>117</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), op.cit.

<sup>118</sup> Norman Podhoretz (1967), *Making It*, New York, Random House

white. The deployment of blackness in this scene may certainly be read as a barometer of Jewish agency in relation to blackness. However, the character, though unseen and unheard, is first made known as the cleaning woman and though she acts as surrogate for the morality of Jews towards blacks, she also acts as surrogate for the morality of an upwardly mobile lower middle class towards the working class. Allen suggests, via this scene, the intertwining of hierarchies of race, ethnicity and class. Alvy, like his father, rejects Podhoretz's position, however, Alvy rejects Podhoretz from a perspective different from his father's. The motif of *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971) is central to Alvy's position, in reinscribing the shared experience of oppression between Jews and blacks in modernity, against Podhoretz's and others' erasure of it. In addition he invokes a politics which transcends ethnic and racial categories: 'I can't enjoy life unless everyone is. If one guy is starving, it puts a crimp in my evening', he says.

In *Annie Hall*, New York is made to represent political engagement with the past and with the future. It is where a radical Jewish politics was forged by the second generation of Ellis Island Jews. When characters declare New York to be a dying city, this may be read as an epitaph for that pre-war leftist Jewish political engagement. That Annie and Alvy go their separate ways in *Annie Hall*, Alvy remaining in New York, is suggestive of Alvy's commitment to retaining that earlier Jewish leftist political engagement. The suggestion in *Annie Hall* is that Jews who figuratively move to LA, both present and past, turn their back on their European history of persecution and so lose that particularity out of which their mid-twentieth century, modern, radical politics was formed. A hopeful happy ending, not of the Hollywood kind, appears in a coda. Sometime after their break up, Alvy learns that Annie returns to live in New York, and takes her partner to see *The Sorrow and the Pity*. This suggests that not only is political transformation possible, if slow, but also that political empathy is not confined within bounded ethnic or racial identities.

In *Manhattan* Allen extends his critique of the contemporary politics of the New York intellectuals. In particular, Allen attacks the transatlantic, high modernist aesthetic turn of the New York Jewish Intellectuals. In developing this theme, Allen's device of transatlantic triangulation returns as, again, Allen develops a dialogue with Baldwin, inverting Baldwin's Old World/New World binarism to fix the centre of an alternative Jewish Atlantic in Manhattan. In *Manhattan*, characters' lives and affairs are incestuously interwoven, as in *Another Country*, and Allen, like Baldwin, uses Manhattan locations, with characters' interactions taking place in apartments, in Central Park, and the bars and clubs of Manhattan. For Baldwin, via the character of doomed black, bisexual, musician Rufus, Manhattan is a place of alienation and existential loneliness, where, even amongst the bohemian characters of his novel and their circle, powerful, historical discourses of race, ethnicity and sexuality shape contemporary experience and individual lives in fateful and seemingly inexorable ways. In *Another Country*, the effort for Baldwin's characters to resist the power of these discourses is painful and, for Rufus, it proves impossible. It is only when the character of Rufus is reimagined as Eric,<sup>119</sup> bisexual, but now white, from the South, and living in France, that he can have the future denied to Rufus. On the one hand, Baldwin's plea is for an escape from the force of America's history of racial and sexual prohibitions. For Baldwin, it is history which imprisons his characters and compels them to perpetuate tensions, hatreds and misunderstandings. In contrast, for Allen, the legacy of Jewish persecution is to have produced an empathic and critical political sensibility, echoing Deutscher's argument for the distinctive cultural contribution of 'non-Jewish Jew',<sup>120</sup> and anticipating Gilroy's claim to the cultural legacy of slavery as a

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<sup>119</sup> James A Dievler (1999), 'Sexual Exiles: James Baldwin and *Another Country*', in *James Baldwin Now*, Dwight A. McBride New York, New York University Press: 161-183

<sup>120</sup> Isaac Deutscher (1968), *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, London, Oxford University Press.

productive one,<sup>121</sup> in which the lived experience of oppression produces a critical perspective.

*Manhattan* opens with a montage sequence, in greyscale, of shots of contemporary Manhattan. Some images, showing the city as dirty and impoverished seem inspired by those early twentieth century scenes of immigrant working class life in New York photographed by Riis and Hine. However they also reflect negative 1970s representations of New York, a place which had come to be seen, amongst other things, as a crime-ridden and violent city. The montage juxtaposes the iconography of social reportage, washing lines in tenements, garbage-filled streets, workers and street markets, with the filmic Manhattan of upscale shops, fashionable people and modernist architecture. Manhattan is represented as multi-racial and multi-faceted. The montage is accompanied by Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and Allen's voice, as Isaac Davis, apparently writing the opening lines to a novel:

Isaac: Chapter one. He adored New York City. He idolised it all out of proportion. Uh, no, make that, he romanticised it all out of proportion. To him, no matter what the season, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsated to the great tunes of George Gershwin....

... Let me... try and make it more profound.

Chapter one. He adored New York. To him, it was a metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture; the same lack of integrity to cause so many people to take the easy way out was rapidly turning the town of his dreams...

No, it's gonna be too preachy. I mean, face it, I wanna sell some books here...

The voice-over, which moves between romanticism and pulp, via naturalism, attempts, but fails, to anchor the visual contrasts, some of which offer a counterpoint to the imagery of the speech. Then Allen is silent and the Gershwin score is foregrounded, reaching its

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Gilroy, op.cit.

crescendo in a celebratory fusion of sound and images, and the New York skyline is lit by an explosion of fireworks. The final shot, of skyscrapers, pyrotechnics, and the Gershwin climax, does away with any suggestion of postmodern fragmentation and fixes Manhattan in its modernist halcyon era. The images of multiethnic New York shot in tonal gradations of black and white, the score of black and European-inflected Jewish music, emphasise the cultural hybridity which comprised New York of the first half of the twentieth century, and Gershwin's music recalls, again, the nineteen-thirties era of Jewish radicalism; ideas and principles from which Allen's characters have distanced themselves, as will be argued. Nevertheless, in Allen's *Manhattan*, as in Baldwin's *Another Country*, racial and ethnic groups live largely segregated lives. The exception is the milieu of the New York intellectual and cultural elite inhabited by Allen's characters as the lives and relationships of Jews and WASPs appear exchangeable. However, it will be argued that *Manhattan* suggests that this coalition rests on the erasure of history, and a betrayal of principles the New York Jewish Intellectuals once held dear.

Allen uses his characters once more as ciphers to represent contrasting political and philosophical positions. The character of Yale Pollack (Michael Murphy), is made to stand for the neo-conservative turn of the New York Jewish Intellectuals and Allen deploys a range of signifiers to position Yale politically and intellectually. His clothes and name are, it seems, intended to contrast with those of Isaac. While Isaac is seen wearing the same guerilla jacket as Alvy Singer in *Annie Hall*, suggesting some continuity not only of persona, but of political values, Yale, in contrast, wears a tweed sports jacket. Yale's name and costume may be read as connoting his membership of the privileged, Ivy League, establishment, which Allen has previously disparaged in *Annie Hall*, and which, in Allen's universe of signifiers, are suggestive of Jewish assimilation into this elite. This suggestion is reinforced by references to Yale's high modernist aesthetic, the transatlantic

aesthetic which, though it may have been *avant-garde* before The Second World War, came to be the dominant philosophy of the neo-conservative New York Jewish Intellectuals in the post-World War II academy.

Yale is an academic, involved in the world of the 'little' magazines, trying to get his own magazine started. Yale's allusion to a review of a Jewish writer's book on Virginia Woolf and his rationalisation of art as a thinking-through process are references which serve to locate him in the cultural and philosophical milieu of the post-war New York Jewish Intellectuals which Allen critiques. As embraced and developed by the New York Jewish Intellectuals, the discourse of high modernism adopts the Kantian aesthetic to privilege some kinds of knowledge, and ways of knowing, over others. High modernism's aesthetic underpins its distinction between high (modernist) culture, mass culture, and middlebrow culture. The latter earned special contempt from modernists, such as Woolf,<sup>122</sup> and the critics who championed them, such as Dwight MacDonald,<sup>123</sup> as a dumbed down, *ersatz*, version of high culture, masquerading as something it was not. Characterised as intellectually undemanding, middlebrow was viewed as reactionary, and its tendency to sentimentality and nostalgia was seen by modernists as evidence for its inability to critically explore contemporary experience. Middlebrow culture was viewed by Woolf as 'betwixt and between': neither honestly 'low' like the culture of the masses, which provoked visceral bodily responses, nor was it intellectually demanding or challenging, as was the cerebral culture of the modernists.<sup>124</sup> The approach to middlebrow is exemplified in Clement Greenberg's *Avant-garde and Kitsch*.<sup>125</sup> In this extremely influential essay, Greenberg argued that *avant-garde* artists break cultural and artistic boundaries, reject formulaic rules and so create new forms and

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<sup>122</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Middlebrow', in *The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays*, London, Hogarth Press, 1942: 113-19

<sup>123</sup> Dwight Macdonald, 'Masscult & Midcult' *Partisan Review*, Spring, 1960: 203-33

<sup>124</sup> Virginia Woolf, op.cit

<sup>125</sup> Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch', in *Art and Culture*, Beacon Press, 1961: 3-21

new ways of interpreting experience. Modernism, for Greenberg, was the *avant-garde* of his day. *Kitsch*, in contrast is understood as the commercial recycling and mass production of previously *avant-garde* forms. The result is the manufacture of brash and tasteless objects, parodies of higher forms, now mass produced for less discerning minds. Parody, in Greenberg's usage, is a negative term, and seems to have no critical or artistic value. Allen's frequent use of parody, for example, as discussed here, in *Play It Again Sam*, places him in opposition to Greenberg on this point. In his knowing use of *kitsch* in *Manhattan*, Allen overtly opposes Greenberg's evaluations of *avant-garde* and *kitsch*. In particular, *kitsch* nostalgia and sentimentality operate in *Manhattan* both to refer to the past as a resource and to oppose the closed categories of high modernism. An example of Allen's use of *kitsch* is when Isaac and Mary walk her dog, by the river, before dawn, to the orchestrated strains of the Gershwins' *Someone to Watch Over Me* arranged in the pre-war style, and used, it is suggested, ironically as the lyric provides an 'ominous' undercutting of the surface romance as Allen is falling in love with Mary.<sup>126</sup> The *mise-en-scene* uses an iconography reminiscent of *fin de siècle* Paris: the river, the street lamps, the bridge and the trees suggest the Seine rather than the East River, which is more usually referenced in gangster genre films as a place where dead bodies can be thrown. He is wearing black tie and Mary wears a floaty dress, combined with a 1940s style jacket. Her hair, too, is modeled on 1940s styles, though her chignon, not to mention the dog, once more recall representations of the Parisian *fin de siècle*. As Isaac and Mary are seated on a bench, beside the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, all are silhouetted against the monochrome greys of the river and sky. This highly romanticised and sentimental vision of Manhattan would, undoubtedly, in its nostalgic pleasures, be designated *kitsch* by Greenberg, not least in its use of the music of 'Tin Pan Alley', a particular target of Greenberg's. If the production of pleasure alone were the function of the sequence, that in

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<sup>126</sup> Adam Harvey (2007), foreword by Dick Hyman, *The Soundtracks of Woody Allen: A Complete Guide to the Songs and Music in Every Film: 1969-2005*, NC, McFarland



itself would arguably place Allen in opposition to Greenberg's hierarchy of values. Later on there is a further use of *kitsch*, when Isaac and Tracy ride around Central Park in a horse and carriage; an amenity which exists for the tourist trade, once more accompanied by a Gershwin song. The embrace of *kitsch*, in the figure of Tracy, is suggestive that *kitsch* allows expression of a lack and desire to fulfil that lack. Rather than being dismissed as uncritical middlebrow sentimentality, Allen suggests *kitsch* needs to be seen as expressive of desire for emotional connection; an acknowledgment of which, Allen suggests, was missing from Greenberg's, and high modernism's, understanding of cultural experience.

The 59<sup>th</sup> Street sequence opposes not only high modernism's hierarchies, but this opposition is also related to Allen's transatlantic triangulation in which the Jamesian and Baldwinian binarisms are interrogated. In *Manhattan's* economy of signs, already suggested in the film's modernist opening montage, Allen's use of nostalgic iconography constructs an imagery which alludes to the interwar transatlantic modernity in which so many aspects of American culture, while disparaged by American intellectuals, were admired by their European counterparts: skyscrapers, movies, jazz, machinery and even comics.<sup>127</sup> Those Americans heading for Paris in search of culture found the very things they wished to escape such as machines, elevators and adverts.<sup>128</sup> At the moment when Isaac and Mary are seated on the bench, they are re-imagined as Europeans and when Isaac gazes up at the Queensborough Bridge, the bridge may be read as a symbol of transatlantic modernity. The imagery of transatlantic modernity offers a contrast to the images of ghetto and *shtetl* which predominate in narratives of ethnic revival of the time,<sup>129</sup> and suggests that Woody Allen's particular, Jewish, version of ethnic revival is not anti-

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<sup>127</sup> Michael North, 'Transatlantic Transfer: Little magazines and Euro-American Modernism', [http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/exist/mod\\_mag/file/north\\_transatlantic\\_transfer.pff](http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/exist/mod_mag/file/north_transatlantic_transfer.pff), 25/02/2009

<sup>128</sup> Michael North, *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006), *op.cit.*

modern, as are other ethnic revival narratives.<sup>130</sup> Rather, it is distinctly pro-modern, though it is ambivalent towards modernism. Allen's re-imagined Manhattan defies the influential Jamesian denigration of New York's late nineteenth century changing ethnic diversity,<sup>131</sup> and his representation of the city as in decline, as a result. Allen also engages with Baldwin's rhetoric of freedom from oppression, which suggests that it is to be discovered neither in America, nor in a self-imposed European exile from America, but perhaps in another, yet to be realised, country. Allen offers a space between Europe and America in his re-imagined Manhattan, which, for him, can be another country; a space where Baldwin's yet to be realised country can exist.

Allen's imagery traverses Baldwin's divide to construct a transatlantic synthesis 'betwixt and between' Europe and America. In Allen's *Manhattan*, Manhattan is figuratively fused with Paris. His comment, to Tracey, 'We'll Always Have Paris', refers once more to *Casablanca*. At one level, it echoes Rick's words to Ilsa, and plays with layers of intertextuality, for example, in the idea of Mariel Hemingway, as Tracey, channeling both Ingrid Bergman and Lauren Bacall, to Allen's Bogart. At another, it also suggests that Manhattan, like wartime Paris, is under occupation; a cultural occupation by the New York Jewish Intellectual neo-conservatives. At the ERA benefit, Isaac says there are Nazis marching on New Jersey and the only response is to attack them with baseball bats. The allusion is suggestive of a call for an adequate leftist response to neo-conservatism, to create the Manhattan of his imagination. Allen's imagining of New York as a transatlantic modernist space suggests that it is not modernity itself which is troubling, but rather particular aspects of modernism, and the neo-conservative political agendas which came to be interwoven with modernism in the academy.

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<sup>130</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1907

Greenberg's deployment of longstanding tropes to construct discrete modernist categories is difficult to separate from his change in political consciousness. Greenberg, like Podhoretz and many other New York Jewish Intellectuals, moved from Marxism in the 'thirties to neo-conservatism, fuelled at least in part by anti-communism. Greenberg's endorsement of abstract expressionism, and Jackson Pollock in particular, was part of his drive to promote American modernism against the repression of modernism witnessed first in Nazi Germany then in the Soviet Union, but must also be read in the context of his membership of the CIA sponsored American Committee for Cultural Freedom in the 1950s.<sup>132</sup> In *Manhattan*, Allen has his characters reference Greenberg's modernism from the opening dialogue:

Yale: I think the essence of art is to provide a kind of working-through situation, so that you can get in touch with feelings you didn't know you had.

Isaac: Talent is luck. The important thing in life is courage.

Yale attempts to fix a definition of art in the manner of Greenberg; one which attempts to rationalise, and so contain, emotion. As in the gallery scene in *Play It Again Sam*, Allen links Yale's American modernism with a sterile detachment and a lack of emotional response to experience. Isaac's response is, ironically, also derived from Greenberg, as according to him, courage is the defining ingredient in the constitution of the *avant-garde* artist.<sup>133</sup> A dialogue with Greenberg's essay is pursued in *Manhattan* and the theme of courage is used to critique the contemporary New York Jewish Intellectuals. It is suggested again in an encounter when Isaac is introduced to Mary, Yale's lover. Mary seems overbearing and arrogant and Isaac is instantly antagonistic towards her. His hostility increases as she, and Yale, dismiss Van Gogh and Ingmar Bergman, amongst others, as overrated:

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<sup>132</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, op.cit.

<sup>133</sup> Clement Greenberg, op.cit.

Yale: Mary and I have invented the Academy of the Overrated for such notables as....

Mary: Gustav Mahler.....

Yale: Isak Dinesen and Carl Jung...

Mary: Scott Fitzgerald.....

Yale: Lenny Bruce. Can't forget him, can we?

Mary: How about Norman Mailer?...

Isaac: I think those people are all terrific. Gee, what about Mozart?

You guys don't wanna leave out Mozart.

Mary: Well, how about Vincent Van *Goch*?

Isaac: She said 'Van *Goch*'?!

Mary: Or Ingmar Bergman?

Yale: You'll get in trouble....

Isaac: Bergman? Bergman's the only genius in cinema today, I think.

Yale: He's a big Bergman fan....

Mary: God, you're so the opposite. You write that fabulous television show. It's so funny and his view is so Scandinavian. It's bleak, my God. I mean, all that Kierkegaard, right? Real adolescent, fashionable pessimism. I mean, the silence. God's silence. OK, OK, OK. I mean, I loved it when I was at Radcliffe, but, all right, you outgrow it.

Here, Allen parodies fashionable relativism, and is scathing about it. The canonical figures chosen by Allen to make this point seem to have been chosen on the basis that at some point they have all confronted and challenged the artistic, political or intellectual mores of their time, and so demonstrated Greenberg's requirement for courage as the basis of artistic endeavour. In contrast Yale, and Mary, in different ways are shown to lack artistic and intellectual courage, for example Mary writes novelisations; a commercially safe but creatively sterile enterprise. In contrast Isaac gives up his well paid work in television to write a novel. Yale's plan for a review of a new book on Woolf by 'David Cohen' suggests his lack of inspiration, and his recycling of moribund, modernist themes, again suggesting sterility. Yale's view of art becomes increasingly ironic as, though he and Mary spend their

time making judgments about aesthetic values, they seem never to get in touch with their feelings.

Isaac's left liberal politics are illustrated in various ways, for example when we see him as a supporter at an ERA benefit in which Bella Abzug, defender of victims of the HUAC, and feminist and labour activist is guest of honour. His anti-Zionist views surface in a joke, about his mother, conflating Zionism with castration. His pleasure in *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, France, 1937), and his encouragement to Tracey to watch it, position him as a supporter of class solidarity against the dangers of national and ethnic affiliations and operate to suggest not only his leftist, but also his transatlantic political sensibilities. In contrast, Allen portrays Yale as lacking integrity; a betrayer of trust; spoiled, selfish, and unprincipled. Yale's individualism and aspirationalism is demonstrated when he is shown buying a Porsche; and is heedless of Isaac's comment that New York has a pollution problem, and that cars should be banned from New York. The opposing political sensibilities represented by Yale and Isaac are articulated in a confrontation towards the end of the film:

Yale: I'm not a saint, OK?

Isaac: You're too easy on yourself. Don't you see? You're... You rationalise everything. You're not honest with yourself. You talk about you wanna write a book, but in the end you'd rather buy a Porsche. You cheat a little bit on Emily and you play around the truth with me. The next thing you know you're in front of a Senate committee naming names.

Yale: You are so self-righteous. I mean, we're just people. We're just human beings. You think you're God!

Isaac: I gotta model myself after someone.

Yale: You just can't live the way you do. It's all so perfect.

Isaac: Jesus, what are future generations gonna say about us? My God! You know, someday we're gonna be like him. And he was probably one of the beautiful people,

dancing and playing tennis. And now look. This is what happens to us. You know, it's important to have some kind of personal integrity. I'll be hanging in a classroom one day and I wanna make sure when I thin out that I'm... well thought of.

The significance of the Porsche is hard to ignore. The car as a symbol of American values of freedom and democracy is inverted, as Allen makes it stand instead for American consumerism, and environmental harm. That the Porsche company once made tanks for Hitler may be of minor significance, but can only serve to compound Yale's guilt, and also speaks of the primacy of transatlantic capitalism, linking this via the sign of Yale to the neo-conservative project. Isaac's reference to the naming of names directly indicts the New York Jewish Intellectuals who allied themselves with anti-communism and betrayed their earlier beliefs. This betrayal is a recurrent motif, referenced earlier in *Manhattan*, by the presence of Bella Azbug, and is represented as a key moment in the construction of opposing Jewish Atlantics. As in *Annie Hall*, Allen sets up a binaristic opposition between a neo-conservative turn in the politics of the New York, (Jewish), intellectuals, in the figure of Yale, and a leftist, alternative Jewish identity in the figure of Isaac.

Yale has an on/off relationship with Mary Wilkie (Diane Keaton). Mary initially appears to be, like Annie in *Annie Hall*, a WASP of uncompromised whiteness and of comparative middle-class privilege as an alumna of Radcliffe, the women's college which at that time was still the subaltern sibling to Harvard. However, reference to the Pope, and her name, suggest a Catholic, rather than WASP, background, and therefore a measure of class and ethnic marginality. Unlike Annie, Mary's whiteness is never emphasised by the use of lighting. In Dyer's terms, she is never made to glow.<sup>134</sup> In fact, the opposite is the case, as in Allen's monochrome Manhattan, the conventions of lighting for whiteness are negated in

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit.

Mary's case, as she is kept in the shadows wearing dark clothes,<sup>135</sup> and so her whiteness is less than guaranteed. This is in contrast to Tracy, who like Annie in *Annie Hall*, is lit to enhance her whiteness: the contours of her face are made to shimmer, and she is conferred a radiance. Mary's character is suggestive of Allen's reading of the postmodern turn in American culture, which, via the figure of Mary, has the potential for the collapse of all values in relativism: the work of the members of the 'Academy of the Overrated' is no more or less worthy than a novelisation, for example. In another use of parody, in a gallery scene which recalls the earlier gallery scene in *Play It Again Sam*, Mary describes 'the steel cube' in glowing terms as having a 'kind of negative capability', a term proposed by Keats to define a state of an acceptance of doubt and uncertainty. Here, parody is used to ironise her slavish allegiance to Yale's rationalising modernism, for example, when she dismisses the legacy of the first generation of New York Jewish Intellectuals, with comments which suggests Yale's influence: 'Do you know that magazine? It's a little magazine. They're such schmucks up there. Really mired in Thirties radicalism.' Via the figures of Mary and Yale, and their relationship, Allen suggests that the postmodern turn marks a state of flux and uncertainty over values; a state which is vulnerable to the lure of the confident certainties of neo-conservatism.

We are reminded more than once that Mary is from Philadelphia, a city which, deployed by Allen as a signifier, offers a multiplicity of readings. Associated with American narratives of revolution and independence, references to Philadelphia may be read as signifying the apparently optimistic origins of the United States, in a constitution promising individual rights while limiting the rights of corporations.<sup>136</sup> Mary's persona initially seems to embody these narratives as a free and independent spirit, but as the film progresses she is revealed to be much less sure of herself and her identity. Mary herself describes

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<sup>135</sup> Douglas Brode (1985), *Woody Allen: His Films and Career*, NJ, Citadel Press

<sup>136</sup> Ted Nace (2003), *Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabling of Democracy*, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler

Philadelphia not in radical terms, but as a place of traditional values, as she struggles to cope with the Manhattanites' serial adulteries and affairs, suggesting her nostalgia for a past stability. Most importantly, the sign of Philadelphia may also be read as connoting an Africanist presence. Not only is contemporary Philadelphia a city demographically split more or less equally between blacks and whites but even as the constitution was created it was compromised on the issue of slavery. So, in Morrison's terms, the constitution was designed in the presence of an unfree black population, against which whites developed a sense of autonomy, independence and power.<sup>137</sup> Allen's deployment of this Africanist trope develops the idea that Mary's apparent guaranteed whiteness is merely an appearance. Not only is she not a WASP, but her claiming of whiteness necessitates the erasure of a Philadelphian (American) Africanist presence. Mary's apparently self-evident whiteness is further destabilised by her frequent self-deceptions and disavowals, occasionally disrupted by a moment of self-awareness, reinforcing her as a figure in whom appearances belie reality. Just as her character signifies elements of the postmodern, Mary's conflicts and dilemmas are suggestive of the culture wars, and the effort to contend with the emergence of new social movements. For example, the erasure of blackness via the figure of Mary suggests the ongoing betrayal of civil rights first enshrined in the constitution while her intellectual allegiance to a libertarian feminism is at odds with her needs for stability. That Mary chooses Yale over Isaac marks her choice of conservatism over left-liberalism, and, ironically, whiteness over hybridity. This choice may best be understood in terms of the ways her character exhibits, on the one hand, a sense of entitlement, by, for example, frequent references to her origins in Philadelphia, at one time the hub of the new republic; and on the other, a sense of grievance at an apparent decentring of power and privilege, as Philadelphia was very quickly displaced. More diffusely these feelings are expressed in her frustrations over her seeming powerlessness in her relationship with Yale.

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<sup>137</sup> Toni Morrison, *op.cit.*



This combination of feelings of entitlement and grievance is identifiable as part of a white ethnic narrative of resentment, discussed in the introduction. Allen's representation of white ethnicity in the figure of Mary offers a counterpoint to Jacobson's construction of white ethnicity as the default identity. Jacobson's position suggests that there is an equivalence in prestige between white ethnicities. Mary's (gendered) subaltern status, in relation to Yale, signified throughout, undermines this interpretation. Yet at the same time her association with the narrative of Philadelphian foundational whiteness reinforces her sense of entitlement. These contradictory signs suggest Mary feels her entitlement to a privileged identity to which she has never had full access. Her choosing of Yale over Isaac speaks of Mary's white ethnic alliance with Yale's NYJl conservatism as a strategy for achieving the privileged identity, and her need to break away from Isaac, and by association, the contaminating non-white other. Isaac's association with hybridity, constructed from the opening montage, is underlined in his list of those things that make life worth living: Groucho Marx, Willie Mays, the Second Movement of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony*, Louis Armstrong's recording of *Potato Head Blues*, Swedish movies, *Sentimental Education* by Flaubert, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra and *Apples and Pears* by Cezanne, and Tracy's face. It is a hybridised list of black, white, high, low, American and European cultural expression, which serves to reinforce the narrative of New York as a uniquely hybrid transatlantic space, already signified visually and aurally, and now, via the Allen persona. Mary rejects this figurative and literal space and attempts to recuperate a unitary whiteness via the fixed categories of modernist neo-conservatism. That Mary and Yale end up together operates as a metaphor for the neo-conservative harnessing together of discourses of white entitlement and white ethnic grievance narratives.

The figure of Tracy has been read, more recently, in the light of Allen's personal life. However, she also offers other intertextual and intratextual meanings, of broader significance. In *Manhattan*, in an early scene at Elaine's restaurant, Isaac pretends to smoke because it makes him look 'cool' and we discover that Tracy is seventeen; the allusion to Bogart and Bacall is there to be made. These references may recall Bogart and Bacall's participation in anti-McCarthy protests and once more locate Isaac, and indeed Tracy, on the liberal left. However, the channeling of Bogart and Bacall, as well as Isaac's and Tracy's shared pleasure in old films, suggest that Tracy is also a figure of nostalgia, as well as hope. Isaac's reference to Tracy's face alludes to Ingrid Bergman's early Swedish film, *A Woman's Face* (1938), and Isaac's comment, 'We'll always have Paris' offers a further allusion to Bergman. Bergman's whiteness, though literally Nordic, was of a different quality to that of, for example, the pre-war Sonia Henie, and the later Hitchcock blondes of the 'fifties. Their platinum blondeness stands out as an unnatural construction of female beauty, and is deployed to connote wealth and racial superiority.<sup>138</sup> In the post-war era the premium placed on WASP-ness grew greater as white privilege was increasingly challenged at home and abroad.<sup>139</sup> Bergman's screen image, in contrast, is suggestive of a natural and unadorned authentic whiteness, relying on the use of lighting to construct her luminosity. During the war years, Bergman's persona may be read as resonating with a contemporary desire to separate ordinary, everyday, whiteness from extreme whiteness, and a good Europe from a bad Europe. Via the figure of Tracy, channeling the Bergman persona, Allen recalls once again a moment of recognition of oppression and resistance to it. At the same time, the Tracy/Bergman imagery suggests that whiteness is not inevitably oppressive. The film's ending, in which, as Isaac and Tracy say goodbye, *Rhapsody in Blue* starts up again, suggests that Tracy, and Allen's *Manhattan*, stand for a past set of values that may or may not be recuperated. Tracy tells

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<sup>138</sup> Steven Cohan (1997), *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*, Indiana University Press

<sup>139</sup> Steven Cohan, *ibid.*

Isaac he should have a little faith in people, and like *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan* offers a hope that that they may.

In conclusion, in *Play It Again Sam*, *Annie Hall*, and *Manhattan*, Woody Allen uses the resonant 1970s context of ethnic revival to explore the political development of transatlantic Jewish political culture, and to construct an alternative transatlantic discourse in opposition to the neo-conservative Jewish Atlantic, exemplified by Podhoretz and other New York Jewish Intellectuals. In doing so, he rejects hegemonic constructions of white masculinity, and exposes whiteness as empty of content but nevertheless oppressive in its effects. In particular the discourse in which extreme whiteness and ordinary, everyday whiteness are constructed as oppositional polarities is partially critiqued. However, while Allen exploits the conceptual space opened up by ethnic revivalism, he rejects the straightforward narratives of white ethnic grievance articulated in discourses of what Jacobson terms Ellis Island ethnicity.<sup>140</sup> This is not done in the spirit of a Schlesinger-style call for the erasure of difference in a unitary, WASP-dominated, national imaginary, but in order to transcend factional ethnic politics to build a leftist alliance.

Allen constructs a filmic Jewish persona shaped both by (hybrid) Jewish political cultures of the past, and the hybrid expressive cultures of New York. Via this filmic persona, Allen opposes hegemonic constructions of white, American masculinity and the trajectory of contemporary neo-conservative Jewish and Anglo-American political thought. The characters of Allan Felix, Alvy Singer and Isaac Davis provide a voice for the expression of these discontents. Allen claims all three as Jewish, though the content of that identity as constructed by Allen is particularistic and involves claiming a version of Jewishness and making political choices. While Allen distances himself from the Old World Jewish values

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<sup>140</sup> Jacobson (2006), op.cit.

of the ghetto, at the same time, Jewish assimilation is attacked as necessitating the erasure of the history of Jewish persecution, and concomitant collusion with hegemonic whiteness. Allan, Alvy and Isaac, in their relationships with other characters, variously standing in for cultural and political American identities, are a means to explore the development of Jewish political culture and its relationship to whiteness and blackness in the twentieth century. Allen critiques the post-war politics of the intellectual and cultural elite which have come to be known as the New York Jewish Intellectuals and the political choices they have made. He takes issue with their move from a pre-war leftist position, via a post-war anti-Communist, economic-liberal position, to a post-civil rights neoconservative one. Allen rejects three tendencies in contemporary Jewish American political culture: firstly, the neoconservative, transatlantic, anti-affirmative action position exemplified by the contributors to *Commentary*, *Dissent*, and other little magazines which share the neo-conservative agenda; secondly, the related desire for assimilation into hegemonic bourgeois whiteness; and thirdly, the concomitant drift away from direct political engagement. In all three films, Allen expresses the hope for a return to an earlier, leftist, position which was central to pre-war Jewish political culture. The critique of Jewish neo-conservatism needs to be read in the post-war context of Cold War politics, US involvement in Vietnam and support for Israel. While this context is not overtly referenced, the inference is there to be made that with the post-war hegemony of an anti-communist, neo-conservative agenda America, and Jewish political culture, have taken the wrong direction. Allen's nostalgia for pre-war and wartime expressive cultures represents his view that this was the moment when alternatives were possible.

Allen deploys Africanist motifs to position his own version of Jewishness, both in relation to blackness and whiteness, ultimately distancing Jewishness from whiteness, locating Jewishness as neither black nor white but as in-between, or 'right in the middle'. Allen

attempts to deconstruct whiteness, and to expose it as an empty oppressiveness; this effort is partially successful. At the same time, narratives of white ethnic grievance are rejected as exclusive and hierarchical. Jewish assimilation is critiqued as a process in which Jewish identity has become a privileged one, colluding with ethnic and racial hierarchies. Allen deploys motifs of anti-Semitism to distance his narrative of Jewishness from privileged whiteness and Jewish assimilationism. Suggesting the shared history of oppression between blacks and Jews, Allen allies himself with blackness via the deployment of these motifs and of Africanist tropes.

The films deploy transatlantic triangulations, drawing on the trope of the border-crossing Jew, anticipating Gilroy's post-national understandings of identities as hybrid and syncretic,<sup>141</sup> to reject traditional European and American binarisms. Allen develops Baldwin's suggestion of an imaginary space, between Europe and America – another country – located it in his re-imagined Manhattan. Allen's Manhattan is imagined as a democratic fusion of hybrid expressive cultures, an alternative modernity, imagined in opposition to modernism's hierarchies. This construction of Manhattan is a direct challenge to the Podhoretzian neo-conservative construction of a Jewish journey from ethnic Otherness into privileged, default, whiteness. Allen's critical, alternative Jewish Atlantic, rejects a hierarchical transatlantic culture, and embraces the space between discrete categories of race and gender, as well as modernist mind / body binarisms.

However, there remain, in these films, troubling traces of the racial and ethnic hierarchies Allen is so concerned to destabilise. Not only is ethnic whiteness, represented unfavourably, but Allen's positioning of Jewishness as 'right in the middle' serves not only to reassert the binaristic polarities of whiteness and blackness, but erases the messy problem of ethnic whiteness altogether. Furthermore, while Allen is at pains to avoid the

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<sup>141</sup> Paul Gilroy, *op.cit.*

default position, the positioning of Jewishness in the middle, arguably, reasserts a hierarchy of white, Jewish and black. This is because while both extreme whiteness and ordinary everyday whiteness are critiqued often, whiteness remains visually privileged in the figures of Annie and Tracy; in particular, Tracy's luminosity seems to be linked to her moral goodness. In contrast, while blackness is elevated aurally via Allen's soundtracks and references to black musicians, and is visually recognised in the Manhattan montage sequence, it remains a surrogate identity. Its function is frequently not to speak on its own behalf but to speak on behalf of other characters, Allen's in particular. It is difficult not to conclude that Allen's uses of Africanist tropes are intended primarily to locate his construction of Jewishness in opposition to the NYJ neo-conservatives, and that his critique of whiteness is undermined by his reproduction of cinematic conventions in the representation of prestige whiteness. Allen's efforts to avoid constructing the Jewish identity as the default identity, and therefore to resist ethnic and racial hierarchy, are undercut by his use of the romantic comedy genre, despite his avoidance of the conventional ending. His characters' roles as mentor, first to Annie in *Annie Hall*, then to Tracy in *Manhattan*, are balanced out, by both Annie and Tracy leaving him to develop their own identities. This final balancing, in which he finally learns as much from them operates to construct both couples as the generic romantic-comedy couple, and thus Allen, necessarily, as the default masculine identity.

## White Atlantic Romance: A Really Special (White) Relationship

This chapter is concerned with the emergence and development of the transatlantic romantic comedy of the 1990s which it is suggested was a self-conscious articulation of a white Atlantic paradigm. Most associated with the films of Richard Curtis, the sub-genre was a hybrid of British and Hollywood genres in an effort to target the US market. They effectively revived a moribund British film industry, but were criticised<sup>142</sup> for their representation of Britain as almost homogeneously white and middle-class.<sup>143</sup> A genealogy to the transatlantic rom-coms from the Woody Allen romances of the 1970s will be traced, and the discussion will explore the context for its emergence in a convergence of market imperatives and cultural shifts and consider the idea that the genre constituted a self-conscious construction of a white Atlanticist paradigm. The content of this paradigm will be considered in a close reading of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, and in a consideration of the development of the genre after that film.

Writing on British cinema suggests that it is no longer possible to talk about a national cinema. Cinema, of all nations, is now understood by some as transnational or post-national.<sup>144</sup> The idea of *post*-national suggests that there was, previously, some stable concept of the national, however much an imagined one. However, as much as it has been desired by some<sup>145</sup> the idea of a discretely British national cinema has been elusive in reality. British cinema, almost from its beginnings, has been engaged in transatlantic dialogue. That the London romantic-comedies of the last two decades, *Four Weddings*

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<sup>142</sup> Nick James (2001), 'They Think It Is All Over', in Robert Murphy, (ed), *The British Cinema Book*, 2nd edition, London, BFI

<sup>143</sup> Paul Dave, op.cit.

<sup>144</sup> Andrew Higson (2000), 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema', in Mette Hjort & Scott Mackenzie (eds), *Cinema & Nation*, London, Routledge: 63-74

<sup>145</sup> John Hill (2000), 'From the New Wave to 'Brit-Grit': Continuity and Difference in Working Class Realism', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds) *British Cinema Past and Present*, London, Routledge: 249-261

and a Funeral, *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, UK, 1998), *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, UK, 1999), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, UK, 2001) and *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, UK, 2003) articulate transatlantic themes is not a new phenomenon, but what *is* new is their self-conscious engagement with the transatlantic, in a context of cultural globalisation and decentring of previously hegemonically secure identities. That the market for this sub-genre of the romantic comedy is a transatlantic one is evidenced by the corresponding films which emerged from across the Atlantic, such as *Kate and Leopold* (James Mangold, US, 2001), *Serendipity* (Peter Chelsom, US, 2001), *Two Weeks Notice* (Marc Lawrence, US, 2002), and the (partially) ironic parody of the genre, *Intolerable Cruelty* (Joel Coen, US, 2003). The transatlantic relationship itself became an object of scrutiny within the London narratives. This adds another dimension to the generic trope of the resolution of gender tensions, as post-Thatcher/Reagan, a tension between the potential of the transatlantic as opportunity and as threat was also played out on screen.

The proliferation of the transatlantic rom-com in the 1990s and at the turn of the century requires some explanation as, after the bedroom comedies of the early 1960s, popular film had turned away from romantic comedy in the 1970s when Hollywood output was dominated by the 'Raging Bulls' generation, dealing with questions of ethnicity, community and masculinity in often epic fashion.<sup>146</sup> *A Touch of Class* (Melvin Frank, US, 1974) and Woody Allen's 1970s romances stand out at this time as rare examples of the genre. In the 1980s, the genre returned, but often with the romance as a sub-text to the main theme as for example, romances frequently took the form of identity swap movies, often addressing questions of masculinity, in which men become boys and boys become men in films such as *Vice-Versa* (Brian Gilbert, US, 1988) and *Big* (Penny Marshall, US, 1988); or

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<sup>146</sup> Peter Biskind (1999), *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-drugs-and Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*, New York, Simon and Schuster



offered narratives of female aspiration as in *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, US, 1988). In contrast, the transatlantic rom-coms needed no alibis for their romance narratives which were the central focus of the films. For George Lipsitz (1998), one of the pleasures of genres is their familiarity. Genre conventions, he suggests, operate in terms of the repetition, reconfiguration, and renewal of familiar forms to engage the audience. As he goes on to add, genres must also evolve, in order that audiences do not grow weary. However, changes in a genre are not only signifiers of market saturation, but of broader cultural and ideological context. Small changes in generic forms offer an index of broader changes in society. In moments of crisis, he suggests, new narratives are needed to reassure or to interrogate pressing problems, which may be incorporated into the genre. Drawing on Derrida he suggests genres are concerned to classify and categorise the kinds of binary oppositions that divide people by gender, race, and class and so have significant ideological effects:

Generic codes often connect activity to identity, reserving clearly defined roles for distinctly gendered, classed and raced characters.<sup>147</sup>

Applying Lipsitz's analysis to the 90s reorientation of the rom-com as the transatlantic sub-genre suggests that a number of imperatives were in play: That the narratives of the 80s no longer addressed the concerns of the 90s; that some societal changes had taken place; that a moment of crisis required a shift in the genre. It is the suggestion here that all of these imperatives applied. The transatlantic romantic comedies emerged at a specific rupture in identity configurations. As suggested in the first chapter of this project, whiteness as the fixed, stable and privileged identity was and is, in a process of decentring. The transatlantic rom-com may be seen as offering the potential both for a new narrative of whiteness and for an opportunity for renewed boundary policing. In *Four*

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<sup>147</sup> George Lipsitz (2001), *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press: 186

*Weddings and a Funeral*, the on-off transatlantic romance between the protagonists, British, upper-middle class, public-school, Charles (Hugh Grant) and Southern American Carrie (Andie MacDowell), reflects tensions, as well as connections in the transatlantic nexus. At the same time transatlantic space, as Gilroy<sup>148</sup> has noted, offers a space between the local and the global; a space in which dislocated identities may find expression. The market possibilities this provides in an Anglophone transatlantic are significant:

While the obligation to succeed internationally requires to some degree an effacing of the specifically national, certain films have used the national itself... as their prime selling point. Images of Britain and Britishness (usually in fact Englishness) became commodities for consumption in the international image market.<sup>149</sup>

The transatlantic rom-com managed to construct and sell an image of Britain as both local *and* as transatlantic space. It will be suggested that the election of Clinton provided the *zeitgeist* which made this possible. Before considering the cultural context of the genre's reinvention, the discussion will consider the genealogy of the transatlantic rom-com from the 1970s romances of Woody Allen.

If, as Bailey suggests, 'film narratives are....inescapably mediated by previously existing film narratives',<sup>150</sup> then a significant mediator of the white Atlanticist rom-coms is the earlier romantic comedy *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, US, 1988), via the 1970s romances of Woody Allen, discussed in the previous chapter. The latter might be said to have been crucial in constructing an initial community of readers, and a market for films with a transatlantic sensibility. *When Harry Met Sally* might be understood as an attempt to

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<sup>148</sup> Paul Gilroy, op.cit.

<sup>149</sup> Andrew Higson (1993), 'Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film', in Lester Friedman, (ed), *British Cinema and Thatcherism*, London, UCL Press: 109-29

<sup>150</sup> Peter J. Bailey, op.cit.: 23

replicate a 'Woody Allen film'. Billy Crystal, as Harry, delivers the one-liners which, like Allen's, derive from an American comedic tradition which emerged from a Jewish humour based on irony and 'deflating profundity'.<sup>151</sup> Narratively and formally *When Harry Met Sally* draws on structures and techniques similar to those of Allen's 1970s comedies, particularly *Annie Hall* (1977). However, subtle formal differences make the narrative finally soothing and confirming, in contrast to Allen's films, which are not, and which offer, at best, a compromise. For example, *When Harry met Sally* intersperses the narrative with 'real' couples talking to camera about when *they* met, and how they are still together, often in spite of obstacles. In *Annie Hall*, a similar device was used in which Allen interrupts the narrative and talks to camera 'as himself'. The effect of Allen's direct address is to undermine the film's claims to mimetic representation.<sup>152</sup> In *When Harry Met Sally*, the effect is just the opposite: rather than the subversion of cinematic images, these interjections establish film's capacity for verisimilitude. This is because while Allen's direct address breaks the fourth wall, the couples of *When Harry Met Sally* do not. Both films use a split screen device to illustrate a crucial point in the characters' relationships. In *Annie Hall*, Annie (Diane Keaton) and Alvy (Woody Allen) are shown in split screen, talking to their respective analysts. The device juxtaposes their very different perceptions of their relationship. In *When Harry Met Sally*, their split screen 'phone conversations show just how in tune they are, if they but knew it. These and other instances are ways in which *When Harry Met Sally* is mediated by the audiences prior exposure to *Annie Hall* and it is that assumed prior knowledge which allows different meanings to be created in the former. There are narrative differences also. The Woody Allen films exhibit tensions about belonging. Woody Allen's characters are always in some sense outsiders, ill at ease with themselves and their environment. As discussed in the previous chapter, Peter Bailey<sup>153</sup> suggests that the tensions about belonging, as well as the ironic quality of Jewish humour

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<sup>151</sup> Peter J. Bailey, *ibid.*: 10

<sup>152</sup> Peter J. Bailey, *op.cit.*: 35

<sup>153</sup> Peter J. Bailey, *op.cit.*

are a response to trying to be both Jewish and Modern. American Jewishness is an essentially hybrid identity, Bailey suggests, and this sense of dislocation has been a central motif in the relationships which Allen's characters have with the female leads. Two things which happen in *When Harry Met Sally* are that while simultaneously exploiting the Jewish sensibility which had proved successful in the Allen comedies, the ethnic tension which produced that humour, though still present, is disavowed. The aspects of Harry which distance him from Sally are overtly displaced onto masculinity. When Harry and Sally finally get together, Harry has changed. Overtly, he has repented of his chauvinism, but he has also repented of his Jewish sensibility. This is signalled by him not being funny any more. That position, occupied by the Woody Allen persona, at the point of two cultures, is no longer occupied by the 'assimilated' Billy Crystal. *When Harry Met Sally* resolves the ethnic tension of the Woody Allen films by 'whitening' Jewishness. In the process, a number of conflicts, explored by Allen, which centre on questions of identity, are simply erased.

The success of *When Harry Met Sally* reinstated romantic-comedy as a marketable genre, and also began the filmic reinvention of New York as a dream city, which since *Manhattan*, had become a site of images of degradation and violence.<sup>154</sup> Not unrelated to this dream, was the visualisation of New York as white. That Woody Allen's New York was also visually white was a charge frequently levelled. However, *When Harry Met Sally* marks a new kind of production of whiteness. In Woody Allen's New York, Allen's characters do not have guaranteed whiteness in the way that his romance partners do in terms of their Anglo inheritance. Ultimately, Allen's films are concerned with problematising Anglo-American whiteness and Jewish assimilation. *When Harry Met Sally* is not. However, what they share is an uncomplicated understanding of Anglo-American as the site of

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<sup>154</sup> Leonard Quart, (2002), 'New York City in American film', in Philip John Davies and Paul Wells, (eds), *American Film and Politics from Reagan to Bush Jr.*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press: 91-105

privilege; in Allen's films this is marked, and critiqued. In *When Harry Met Sally*, it goes unremarked and is unremarkable. In *When Harry Met Sally* the transatlantic dimension of Woody Allen is absent, an absence which is linked to Billy Crystal's assimilation into the mainstream of America. To remain hybrid, straddling both Old and New Worlds is to remain on the margins. So Harry's whitening is inseparable from his Americanisation. In contrast, the London transatlantic romantic comedies restore the transatlantic dimension and as suggested, articulate it as a site of tensions between versions of global capitalism. It will also be suggested that *Four Weddings and A Funeral* enlarges the scope of the white heterosexual rom-com, by its polysemy which allows readings of both a queer Atlantic and a racially hybrid Atlantic, but contains them in the preferred narrative of the white Atlantic. The next section will consider the context of British film culture which has shaped responses to the transatlantic rom-com and its success.

The success of *When Harry Met Sally* and a year later, that of *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, US, 1990) mark a turning point in a return to a genre which had been in abeyance, and provided a model for the revitalisation of British film. The London/New York films have received little serious critical or academic consideration. Much of the explanation for this omission seems to lie in the critical preferences of British and American intellectual culture. A critical British film culture emerged between the First and Second World Wars. Its vocabulary and aesthetic values were cast early on in opposition to an already established Hollywood hegemony. Valorising European art cinema and British realism, British film culture of the period was dismissive of Hollywood 'tinsel'. Similarly, the generations of New York intellectuals who aligned themselves with modernism, self-consciously positioned themselves in varying degrees of opposition to both the Anglo-American bourgeois culture which gained ascendancy in the nineteenth century and the mass culture which emerged with Hollywood's ascendancy in the early

twentieth-century. In this tradition, the middle-brow aesthetic of romantic-comedy is of little interest. Geoff Brown's comments are illustrative of this attitude:

Stand with me in the foyer of one of these still burgeoning complexes..... Bugs Bunny and other Warner cartoon characters wait to greet you, alongside the ranks of popcorn dispensers. Coloured lights play on the ground, suggesting Las Vegas or a club's dance floor, though the ambience in general presumes that the customer's age is about thirteen. We could be in any American cinema, or any multiplex in the Western world built by Warners, UCI, National Amusements or one of the other great chains.<sup>155</sup>

For Brown and others the proliferation of the multiplex is a sign of America's ever extending influence over global society. That the multiplex revolution has enabled a recovery in British cinema attendances and feature production from all-time lows in 1984-85 is weighed against a concomitant retreat from innovation in form and content. Rather than reviving a 'national' cinema, as defined in very particular ways, the UK distribution and exhibition sector follows American trends to the extent that multiplexes are reluctant to show films which have not already proven themselves hits in the US. *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is a perfect example of this. Initially released in the US, it was then billed in the UK as 'America's No.1 Smash Hit Comedy'. In Ian Christie's view:

The multiplex's identity and publicity are firmly geared to a mass audience in search of pre-sold studio fare, accompanied by popcorn and cola. This ambience has served some of the new British films of the 90s well, from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) and *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) to *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1999). But the multiplexes have ignored many more, and more challenging, domestic productions, while proving almost wholly unsuited to foreign-language films (whether dubbed or subtitled).<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Geoff Brown (2001), 'Something for Everyone: British Film Culture in the 1990s', in Robert Murphy (ed), *British Cinema of the 90s*, London, BFI: 27-39

<sup>156</sup> Ian Christie (2000), 'As Others See Us: British Film-making and Europe in the 90s', in Robert Murphy (ed), *British Cinema of the 90s*, London, BFI: 68-79

Brown's and Christie's sentiments are contributions to a longstanding debate within British film culture about Hollywood hegemony. The debate encompasses a range of perceived concerns which are sometimes conflated, often overlapping, sometimes contradictory but are to do with the threat of Americanisation and the preservation of what is thought to be an indigenous culture; the dominance of Hollywood narrative style; the status of film as art; the economic importance of film as industry, and the ideological impact of film as mass media.

The ambivalence towards Hollywood apparent in British film culture in the past still resonates in the comments of Brown and Christie. Academic and popular reviewers alike have placed *Four Weddings and a Funeral* firmly in the category 'tinsel'. For serious reviewers in Britain, *Four Weddings* was emblematic of a capitulation to Hollywood hegemony and a 'retreat from radicalism' as expressed in the 80s new wave; a new wave which coincided with a nadir in cinema attendance in Britain and an all-time low in feature production. In the 1980s British films no longer enjoyed a degree of protectionism and had to compete in the market with Hollywood productions. In the declining market of the mid-80s a British film industry began to seem unsustainable, despite critical acclaim for films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985), *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Terence Davies, UK, 1988) and others. Genre films, in the classical Hollywood style, specifically the romantic-comedy, epitomised by the spectacular success of *When Harry Met Sally* and *Pretty Woman*, offered a model to penetrate no longer just the American market but a global market. As *Pretty Woman* overtly signalled its retelling of *Cinderella*, so in the opening credits, and later, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* subtly signifies its visual and narrative intertextuality with Disney's *Snow White* (William Cottrell, US, 1937), and in particular deploying the camp iconography of the wicked queen; the visual intertextuality with Disney enhancing its global marketability. In a *kitsch* replay of the Rodeo Drive dress

shop scene in *Pretty Woman*, *Four Weddings* signals its genealogy not just from *Pretty Woman*, but also the much earlier *Jezebel* (William Wyler, US, 1938) starring latter-day gay icon, Bette Davis, so suggesting a camp irony, but also, more tellingly its narrative intertextuality with *Jezebel*. In its structure, the narrative of *Four Weddings* follows the pattern of *When Harry Met Sally*, as the couples in both films, meet, then part, then meet again but now there are obstacles keeping them apart. Finally they meet again. Critics who carped about the casting of Andie MacDowell, asking why a British Actress could not have been found were perhaps missing the point. *Four Weddings* was not just, despite appearances, to be a 'British' film for a British audience, but was concerned with weaving a transatlantic fairy-tale for a transatlantic audience. At the same time its allegorical narratives of nation speak to the concerns of a local audience. Taking more than £130m at the box office world-wide in its year of release it was up till that point the most financially successful British film. The next section will develop a close reading of *Four Weddings* to explore the content of its white Atlantic paradigm.

As suggested in the first chapter, strategic rhetorics of whiteness rely on exnomination - the power not to be named or what Dyer terms invisibility.<sup>157</sup> But at a strategic moment in *Four Weddings*, whiteness is named and marked, so the power of exnomination and invisibility is removed, leaving potentially open the question of where it stands on the question of whiteness. *Four Weddings* is a film which performs a lot of work narrativising identities. However, much of the narrative work is performed by allusion, metaphor and symbolism. *Four Weddings and a Funeral* deploys polyvalent rhetorics of whiteness to both problematise and to resecure white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity.

In contrast to Higson's view that some version of nation is marketed as a commodity, Landy suggests that American audiences are less interested in a film's projection of

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<sup>157</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit.



Britishness or Englishness, than in films that create a sense of commonality between American and British popular culture.<sup>158</sup> There are a number of ways in which the film creates this Anglo-American transatlantic bond. Most obviously it does this by the inclusion of American co-star Andie MacDowell, who plays Carrie, one half of the romantic couple. However, the character of Charles, played by Hugh Grant, also has transatlantic resonance. For example, Charles has been seen as 'a worthy successor to the sort of silly asses played by ...David Tomlinson and Ian Carmichael'<sup>159</sup> or another in a long line of upper-class English types, which have 'won consistent favour in America'.<sup>160</sup> Certainly there was a transatlantic audience for the persona which Hugh Grant projected on-screen in *Four Weddings*: the kind of English gentleman which no longer exists, if it ever did, beyond the pages of nineteenth-century novels - Edward Ferrers with a hint of Mr Willoughby.<sup>161</sup> It is a particular model of masculinity which draws on, and plays with, by way of the heritage movie, a nineteenth-century trope of aristocratic masculinity characterised by:

Softness, sensuousness, indolence, luxuriousness, foppishness, and lack of a proper sense of purposes and direction....Independence was....predicated on having the wherewithal not to have to work.<sup>162</sup>

This construction of masculinity draws directly on the heritage genre, and one of its articulations of masculinity, in an already proven to be transatlantically marketable British genre. However, Charles also provides another contemporary articulation of a white male protagonist with a problem. Released a year after *Falling Down* (1993), the definitive 'angry white male' movie, *Four Weddings* offers just one of the 1990s ambiguous or

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<sup>158</sup> Marcia Landy, (1991) *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930 -1960*, Princeton, Princeton University Press

<sup>159</sup> Robert Murphy (2001), 'A Path Through the Moral Maze', in Robert Murphy (ed), *British Cinema of the 90s*, London, BFI: 1-17

<sup>160</sup> Robert Murphy, op cit: 3

<sup>161</sup> Sarah Street (1997), *British National Cinema*, London Routledge:143

<sup>162</sup> Catherine Hall (1992), *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Oxford, Polity: 257

contradictory images of men in which white males in particular were interpellated on both sides of the Atlantic. Charles' 'problem' is not explicitly revealed. He asks why he is routinely a best man and never the groom: 'Maybe it's me', he muses. Another character, Henrietta or 'Duck-face', an ex-girlfriend confirms this idea, 'You've got a real problem, Charles', she tells him. Charles' further thoughts on this, or anything, remain unarticulated, and so we are no nearer to 'knowing' the *real* Charles, Henrietta/Duck-face's point -of-view having been made suspect by her construction as 'hysterical'. This representation of him as having no content fits with the transatlantically articulated discourse of whiteness as empty and having no content. However, this strategy seems to be a way of allowing the audience's own fantasies of white masculinity to be projected on to him. An initial reference to him codes him as a 'confirmed bachelor', potentially coding him as gay. The film was made before the legalisation of civil partnerships, and Charles', and the film's, attitudes to the weddings remain contradictory. While inviting audiences to enjoy the spectacular pleasures which the weddings offer, the film also ironises these pleasures, either narratively, for example by following-up a heritage aesthetic long-shot with a moment of comic farce, or formally, such as in the use of a documentary style, hand-held camera, lingering on frailties and absurdities, as in a 'fly-on-the wall'.

The film is eclectic in its use of historically British genres to articulate allegorical narratives of nation, even while the surface narrative is one of transatlantic hybridity. So that, in terms of form, *Four Weddings* is stylistically a British film, though Hollywood in terms of genre. The hybrid cross-fertilisation of form and genre have produced interesting aesthetic tensions, which allow the film to both disavow and exploit the Hollywood ending, and its pleasures. The weddings, which in the most literal sense, and in the historically racialised sense, are white weddings, as suggested above, utilise filmic styles and conventions from

heritage cinema.<sup>163</sup> A number of stylistic and thematic generic features of heritage have been typified by Higson: history performed as spectacle via a pictorialist camera style; *mise-en-scene* is privileged over narrative; there is a fascination with upper-class life; classic literary texts are the source; and there is a repertoire of actors who appear consistently in successive heritage films. Elements of heritage style and sensibility have since spilled over into representations of Englishness which are not necessarily set in the past, and such elements are apparent in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Notting Hill*.

*Four Weddings* bears a relationship to heritage films in several important ways: it stars Hugh Grant, who first starred as Clive Durham in *Maurice* (James Ivory, UK, 1987), and later Edward Ferrers in *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, UK/US, 1995). It also stars Simon Callow, who also appeared in *Maurice*. *Four Weddings* according to Street, 'displays a fascination with the upper classes, featuring numerous ceremonies at which they, their clothes and possessions are on full display.' However, Street continues, 'In *Four Weddings* there is little sense of the underlying social contradictions and rifts which were suggested in many of the heritage films of the 1980s'.<sup>164</sup> Street's reading of the film is shared by many. However, an alternative reading suggests that contemporary insecurities and uncertainties over identities intrude into the text. It is possible, for example, to see *Four Weddings* as replaying the narrative of *Maurice* in a gay subtext. In *Maurice*, set in Edwardian England, the character played by Grant turns away from a homosexual love to an unfulfilling, but conformist, marriage. In *Four Weddings*, there is an alternative ending for Hugh Grant's character. The film may also be read as redefining race in terms of class. For example, the whiteness of the weddings is marked in a number of ways. The ceremonial aspects of the weddings owe their aesthetic to heritage stylistics and are mono-racial events, metaphorically and metonymically signifying, and making visible,

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<sup>163</sup> Andrew Higson (1993), op.cit

<sup>164</sup> Sarah Street (1997), op.cit.: 110

whiteness. In contrast, the gay funeral owes its *mise-en-scene* to the British-realist tradition, latterly termed 'Brit-grit', and exemplified in the films of Ken Loach. Unlike the Britain of the weddings, 'Brit-grit' Britain, of industrial landscape and council housing may be read as multicultural. It is here that the only non-white face appears as the camera pans to the face of a non-speaking black actor. The presence of a single black mourner, serves by his singularity and containment to mark the exclusive whiteness of the weddings, and to racially mark the participants as white. This presence may be read as suggesting an equivalence between the marginalisation of gay and black identities and might be inferred as solidaristic. It may be further read as acknowledging the existence of that extremely marginalised group, black gays. That polysemic readings are possible is echoed in Landy's comment that *Four Weddings* 'enthralled American intellectuals, members of diverse ethnic groups, the young, feminists and anti-feminists, gay and anti-gay groups.'<sup>165</sup> This polysemy undermines the notion of a straightforward reading of the film as simply an 'upper-class comedy' and may reflect a contested authorship in the production of the film.

The funeral is the funeral of Gareth, who is gay, and played by Simon Callow as a transgressive figure of camp excess and exuberance, starkly at odds with the plain low church background and landscape from which, we are now surprised to learn, he came. And so the funeral refers indirectly to the particular struggle involved in being a gay man in a working-class community and subtly critiques the usual agendas of Brit-grit which have tended toward heterocentrism and white-centredness, focusing on classism, while paying less attention to intra-class prejudices. In death, Gareth's sexuality is veiled in euphemism, as his partner, Matthew is referred to by the priest as his 'closest friend'. We are made to feel that he was too vibrant an individual to stay put or to fit in here. Yet, in

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<sup>165</sup> Marcia Landy (2000), 'The Other Side of Paradise: British Cinema From an American Perspective', Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds), *British Cinema Past and Present*, London, Routledge

his eulogy, Matthew says that Gareth preferred funerals to weddings as he had an outside chance of participating in the first. So the exclusive heterocentrism of the weddings is now marked.

However, it is also suggested, that while the opportunities for 'passing' may be greater for white gays than for blacks, whatever their sexuality, belonging everywhere also means belonging nowhere. If this is Gareth's problem, it is also Charles', and Carrie's. The film's intellectual compass, emblematic of social mobility and inclusiveness, throughout, Gareth acts as speaking proxy for the inarticulate Charles. In his exclamation 'I love that girl' Gareth expresses the love for Carrie which Charles cannot. Before Charles learns of Carrie's engagement to Hamish, Gareth makes the point that a wedding is something couples do when they've run out of things to say to each other as it gives them something to talk about for the rest of their lives, an idea which Charles eagerly embraces, and which provides a rationale for Charles' reluctance to marry. As Charles' proxy, Gareth exclaims 'it's Brigadoon' when he arrives at Hamish and Carrie's twilight Highland wedding, confirming weddings as moments for spectacle - like a Hollywood movie. This is the most stylish, the most 'imaginatively realised' of the weddings: a Vogue wedding, therefore also the most artificial, positing the authenticity of the first two which employed the stylistics of both the heritage genre and documentary. This is Carrie's 'mistake', her Hollywood artifice, her Thatcherite husband. It is significantly, at Carrie's wedding that Gareth dies, and it is not stretching a metaphor too far to see Gareth's actual death as signifying Charles' emotional death. The presence but containment of the lone black mourner at his funeral may be read as a cipher through which Gareth's gay, and by proxy, Charles' straight dilemma can be articulated. In this reading, white, straight, male heterosexuality is centred, and black/gay identities remain marginalised. Significantly, if Gareth speaks for Charles, it is uncertain whether he speaks on his own behalf.

The weddings would appear to present a narrative of nation as a united front. However, the film sets up an uneasy compromise between, on the one hand, waning, inward-looking, traditional upper middle-class values, as represented by Fiona and Tom, by the ceremonies and rituals of the white weddings, and on the other hand, an enterprise culture connected with globalisation, personified in Hamish. Hamish, the 'stiff', coded early on as 'imperialist' and therefore unsuitable love rival to Charles, in fact combines elements of both. The film was billed with the publicity tag 'Five good reasons to remain single' and Charles' 'problem' articulated narratively as an inability to 'meet the right girl' is signified to us in other ways as the unattractiveness of either of these alternative versions of nation: stifling tradition, no longer tenable, and an unappealing philistine capitalism, both irredeemably white. In the will-they-won't-they romance between Charles and Carrie, Carrie represents another route - transatlantic hybridity. It is Carrie's Southernness which allows this. Turner has argued that the qualities of southernness have been a source of fascination, and this fascination is linked to opposing Souths which it encompasses. On the one hand is the desegregated South, which is upwardly mobile and cosmopolitan. This is the New South; Carrie, after all, has worked for Vogue. At the same time the South is imagined as rural with traditional values. Taylor suggests that rather than seeking an authentic 'southernness', we should recognise the syncretic hybridity of Southern culture.

For Taylor, then, the South is a contested concept, and as such allows *Four Weddings* to play with whiteness, blackness and transatlantic identities. The ironic naming of Scarlett, Charles' housemate, acts as metonymic signifier of earlier performances of white and black Atlantics in *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, US, 1939). Carrie's clothes also mark her as embodying both whiteness and blackness. We are alerted, via an exchange between Gareth and Scarlett, that clothes are important signifiers in the film:

Gareth:            Scarlotta, fabulous dress! The ecclesiastical purple and the pagan orange  
                         symbolising the symbiosis in marriage between the heathen and Christian traditions?  
Scarlett:          That's right.

On the one hand, Gareth's tone is parodic, suggesting that meanings may not be so transparent. On the other, it also suggests the film's intertextual playfulness with costume. For example, when Charles first sees Carrie she is wearing a white jacket, but most eye-catching is her wide-brimmed black hat. It signifies her hybridity in its referencing of jazz funerals, but it further suggests that Carrie may be 'passing' as white, in its referencing of Sarah Jane at the funeral of Annie in *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, US, 1959). Black and white, then, in a parodic way, visually mark Carrie's southern hybridity, or the contested south which Taylor describes as a hybrid, performative mixture of European, African and Protestant American routes.

Nevertheless, the use of parody, as suggested earlier, alerts readers to the ubiquity and naturalisation of specific tropes. Carrie's hybridity is suggestive of her eroticisation; as in the slave era, the South became eroticised because of the association of Africans with sexuality.<sup>166</sup> Quadroons and Octoroons, light-skinned women of colour, were selected by wealthy white planters to be their mistresses or *placees*. The fantasy of the sexually transgressive black woman in the body of the virtuous white woman underpinned the *placage* system, as it was known. The ubiquity of these understandings of the sexualised South is made explicit in another parodic scene where Carrie tells Charles her sexual history to a country music soundtrack, wearing a loose cheesecloth shirt in blue and white country checks. In his interrogation of her, and in her responses, the scene evokes, now in parody, Andie MacDowell's earlier role in *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. She tells Charles there was a lot of rolling around in the hay. She is a healthy country girl, without artifice:

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<sup>166</sup> Helen Taylor, op.cit

'natural' and 'authentic'. So Carrie is made to 'carry' opposing souths, the new and the old. The choice of music serves to further mark her racial hybridity, suggesting the whole south, white and black, as sexualised, in a lampoon of southern stereotypes. Her marriage to Hamish signifies her rejection of hybridity and a desire for whiteness, as will be discussed in the next section.

Carrie's determination to marry the 'stiff' Hamish, inexplicable unless she wants the husband, or the wedding, above all else, can be read alternatively as a sign of her desire for whiteness. However, this desire is shown to be misguided. Narratively, this wedding is her mistake. It is coded as 'inauthentic' in a number of ways: its Hollywood artifice, replete with invented traditions of a tourist image of Scotland; and the Anglicized in all but name Hamish. Innocently, she mistakes Hamish for the real thing. The artifice of the wedding suggests that the whiteness she seeks is itself inauthentic. Blackness, signified so strongly when we first see Carrie, is contained during this period. She loses the hat fairly soon, and once her engagement is known she wears white most of the time. In the bedroom scene, which takes place at this point, lighting serves to emphasise her whiteness. In a role-reversal of the previous bedroom scene Carrie lies in bed, lit to achieve the same effects as for Charles in the earlier scene. In these scenes, both Carrie and Charles are lit so that, in Dyer's words:

They are bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls on them from above. In short, they glow.<sup>167</sup>

Such lighting techniques, usually reserved for idealised white women and here applied to Charles as well as to Carrie, now not only confirm their racial sameness but suggest, also, their gender-sameness. We may read the sexual appeal of Carrie for Charles as resting in

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<sup>167</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), *op.cit.*: 122



a fantasy of a sexualised South, linked to a history of taboos against miscegenation. Carrie's hybridity may be read as embodying not only creolised racial identities, but also as both masculine and feminine. Carrie's 'masculinity' is signified in other ways, such as when she stands in her for her dead father in making her own wedding speech, her proposing marriage to Charles and making all the sexual moves in their relationship, and of course, by later, at the funeral, carrying a phallic symbol, a *black* umbrella. It is when Carrie realises her mistake, rejecting Hamish and therefore the fantasy of whiteness, that she and Charles can be together. The dyad of the black mourner/Gareth may be read as being mirrored symbolically in the dyad Carrie/Charles, recuperating the narratives of black and gay identities, which are now, in the body of Carrie, transatlantic identities.

Certainly, the ending of the film is open to alternative interpretations. Carrie wears grey - the middle-tone between white and black. They kiss, under a sky which transcends borders and boundaries. But in a subversion of the romantic-comedy genre, echoing the descent from Woody Allen, they do not marry. He asks her to not marry him for the rest of her life. She says 'I do'. These are wedding vows, then, of a kind. They kiss as camera pans upwards to a lightning-flashing sky. Visually genre conventions are restored as the happy ending is played out. But who is doing the kissing? In one reading, the kiss, in a cropped frame, appears as a kiss between two men, affirming a transatlantic gay marriage. A different reading suggests that their agreement revisits the *placage* system of the New Orleans balls, allowing him access to the fantasy of sexualised blackness, while visible whiteness displaces a taint of miscegenation. Most privileged by the previous narrativisation, is the idea that a white, straight, Charles embraces, to a degree, the potentially exciting pleasures of a transgressive, hybrid and diasporic transatlantic, embodied in Carrie, while at the same time, Charles is allowed to retain his autonomy - there is no wedding - and so the pleasurable but potentially polluting threat of racial and

sexual hybridity is contained. So while *Four Weddings* offers polysemic opportunities, black/gay narratives operate under cover, and audiences have to work to recuperate them. While a gay subtext is easily found here, readers have to work harder at narrativising blackness. The troubling problematic of white 'invisibility' is shown here to be difficult to sustain. It is Carrie's blackness which is invisible here and this raises again questions about the relationship between corporeal bodies and figurative representations, as already discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter. Even if audiences do the necessary work to uncover black and gay narratives, they are nevertheless contained, imaginatively resecuring a privileged space of autonomy for white, straight, middle-class masculinity. This suggests their subaltern status in relation to the hegemony of white Atlantic masculinity.

*Four Weddings and a Funeral* appeared at a historical juncture which anticipated the Blair-Clinton alliance. It is possible to read Charles/Carrie as representing Blair/Clinton, with Charles's upper-middle class, public-school, figure standing in for Blair, while Carrie's subtextual blackness corresponds to Clinton's naming by Toni Morrison as America's first black president. This allusive reading reinforces the idea of a self-conscious construction of a white Atlantic, only possible at that time because it was Anglophile Clinton in the White House, the romance narrative of the film carrying with it the extra-textual aura of the romance of the Atlantic alliance. The potentially liberating subtexts of gay and racially hybrid narratives of *Four Weddings* are suggestive of what appeared to be the liberal agenda of the Blair-Clinton relationship; indicative of a common mind-set and a sharing of the same conceptual language of democracy, welfare and international human rights.<sup>168</sup> They are also indicative of an attempt to critique hegemonic white, masculinity. However, these allusions are not taken forward into the development of the genre. The next section

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<sup>168</sup> Federico Romero, (2007) 'The Twilight of American Cultural Hegemony: A historical Perspective on Western Europe's Distancing from America', in David Farber (ed) *What They Think of Us: International Perceptions of the United States Since 9/11*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford

will summarise the development of the genre up to and including the release of *Love Actually*. This is in order to show the development of the genre both as expressive of the apotheosis of the White Atlantic romance, and of the tensions which became apparent in the white Atlanticist alliance.

*Shakespeare in Love*, not a Richard Curtis script, is probably the high water mark of the white Atlanticist rom-com. The narrative alibi for the whiteness of the film is its historical setting, when it may be supposed that there were few non-whites living in England. However, it is interesting to compare Branagh's Shakespeare adaptations which feature multi-racial casts. In *Shakespeare in Love*, Will Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) has writer's block and cannot finish *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter* until he meets the woman of his dreams, Viola (Gwyneth Paltrow). Inspired by her, he is able to write *Romeo and Juliet*, but they cannot be together, and she leaves for America with the man she must marry, the Earl of Wessex (Colin Firth). It is 'a perilous voyage to an unknown land' and the ship is wrecked. All are drowned save Viola. The ending of *Shakespeare in Love* locates *Twelfth Night* on the shores of America. Will's voice-over says: 'She will be my heroine for all time.' The white Atlantic is signified not only by a romance, but by an origin story, alluding to an origin of American whiteness in England, and touched by Shakespeare. It is a sign that flatters both partners in the special relationship in its relays of canonical high culture.

The most visible and salient aspect of the genre as it develops is the creation of a space which is overwhelmingly white space, but it is a whiteness which is not marked, as it was in *Four Weddings*, but rather it has become naturalised, as the texts confirm the privileged positioning of whites in an uncritical way. As *Four Weddings* expresses ambivalence about the transatlantic, so does *Notting Hill*. Described as a much more personal film for

writer Richard Curtis, it has been suggested that director Roger Michell was hired to create Curtis' vision. In *Notting Hill*, the hero Will Thacker, played once more by Hugh Grant, falls in love with American movie star, Anna Scott, played by Julia Roberts, but her fame is going to get in the way. Saturation marketing of American movies and stars in Britain is signified in the narrative by his inability to escape her image when their relationship founders. This continues an earlier narrative thread which referred to Hollywood and its dominance. In a jokey exchange between Scott/Roberts and another character we learn that while there are British actors on the breadline she makes 15 million dollars a picture. The unequal power relation within the Anglophone white Atlantic<sup>169</sup> is thus referenced. However, this power relation is reversed in the film's wish-fulfilment narrative resolution. Her identity from the start is suggested to be unstable. This is in contrast to Will who is grounded in a community of friends, in the 'London village' he calls home, established from the start by his voice-over narration, referencing, in a modest way, the opening of *Manhattan*, and hinting at their genealogical relationship. This narration establishes the narrative point-of-view as Will's, and this remains the position to the end. The *mise-en-scene* involves a curious visual denial of the multiculturalism from which *Notting Hill* derives its bohemian cachet. It was a matter of passing controversy that a film set in the location of Europe's largest Afro-Caribbean street carnival - a carnival without which few outside west London would have heard of Notting Hill - showed no black faces in *Notting Hill*. It would have been a simple matter for Curtis to have included a multi-racial cast of extras which would have dampened the impact of criticism. That he did not suggests consciously or unconsciously, a construction of a white *Notting Hill*. The term, Notting Hill, which previously signified blackness to a transatlantic constituency is now made to signify whiteness in a cinematic erasure of Others. Once more the film plays on intertextuality with *Pretty Woman*, in which Roberts' transformation narrative in that film is echoed in *Notting Hill*. In contrast with *Pretty Woman*, in which Richard Gere's character is also

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<sup>169</sup> Federico Romero (2007), op.cit

transformed, in *Notting Hill*, Will remains the same and Anna must change in order to be with him. It is his influence which transforms her, in a Pygmalionesque narrative expunged of Shavian critical irony. At one point he suggests she ought to be doing Henry James, rather than the courage-under-fire type action movie she is working on. At the end of the film, when she chooses Will, she *is* doing Henry James. Where the polysemy of *Four Weddings* allows several narratives to be read simultaneously, though under a hegemonic whiteness, *Notting Hill*'s preferred meaning is one of white masculinity, recentred, in a construction of Atlanticist whiteness.

*Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) offers a further example of the genre's continued whitening. The opening sequence shows Bridget (Renee Zellweger) making her way in the snow to her parents' for Christmas. The image is reminiscent of a twee 'Dickensian' Christmas, with the large-ish cottage seen in the distance with lights twinkling in the snow. It is a recycled heritage shot; fitting because the film is adapted from Helen Fielding's novel, based on her newspaper columns, which were an ironic update of Jane Austen. The film is book-ended by snow as the happy ever after resolution takes place in a snowy London, again at Christmas. The whiteness of the *mise-en-scene* is reinforced by Renee Zellweger's Nordic whiteness. However the white Atlantic is under some pressure. Caddish Daniel Cleaver, played by Hugh Grant, channelling Willoughby rather than Ferrer, has cheated on Bridget with a younger American, and Mark Darcy (Colin Firth) is nearly head-hunted by a hot shot New York firm, but flies back to Bridget. His return is represented as not only an act of love but of patriotism. The anti-American sentiment is a new element in the transatlantic discourse of the genre and may be read as indicative of an early rift in the white Atlantic.

This rift is both healed and widened in the ostensibly multicultural, *Love Actually*. The film opens with a montage of couples embracing at Heathrow, as Hugh Grant's narrative voiceover pays homage to the victims of the attack on the Twin Towers. The theme of the film is *Love is All Around*, as an undertitle tells us. *Love Actually* suggests, more explicitly than any other white Atlanticist Rom-com, a white liberal, democratic sensibility for the genre and its audience. The transatlantic relationship is assumed to be between Britons and Americans, members of a like-minded, imagined, community, a white Atlantic audience. The drawing of boundaries around who is included in the community takes place in the scene where the British Prime Minister (Hugh Grant) stands up to the visiting American President (Billy Bob Thornton), and rejects the unequal power relations of the special relationship. Released on the day after President Bush went home from a controversial state visit,<sup>170</sup> the dissonance between the diegetic politics of the film and the realities of transatlantic politics was made plain. The context of the film's release is eight months after the invasion of Iraq, when there had been a sea change in British attitudes to the special relationship.<sup>171</sup> However, the multi-stranded narratives distinguish between the American president, and the American people, and use romance to once again draw the boundaries of white Atlanticism. The film offers in the character of Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) a significant black character, a first for a Richard Curtis film. However, Peter has little to say. He is the new husband of Juliet (Keira Knightley). His role is to be the obstacle to his best friend Mark's (Andrew Lincoln) unrequited love for Juliet. The narrative is told from Mark's point of view, and its resolution operates to centre Mark's suffering, and once again position whiteness as the default identity, reinforcing the white Atlanticism of the film.

This chapter has argued that the emergence of the transatlantic romantic-comedy sub-genre, while developing genealogically from the Woody Allen romances of the 1970s, and

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<sup>170</sup> Michael White & Ewen MacAskill, 'Laura, Me and 700 Friends', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 19 November, 2003

<sup>171</sup> Andrew Gamble & Ian Kearns (2007), 'Recasting the Special Relationship', in David Held & David Mephram (eds), *Progressive Foreign Policy: New Directions for the UK*, London, Institute for Public Policy Research: 116-132

in the context of the revival of romantic comedy, constituted the mobilisation of a white Atlanticist discursive paradigm. The discussion has suggested that the meanings of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* can be read in terms of an intertextual relay with the incipient Blair-Clinton alliance, its available polysemic racialised and gay narratives confirming a liberal, democratic, human rights based mindset, while nevertheless, privileging white masculinity as the default white Atlanticist identity. The potential for these subaltern codings to speak further, was not however, evidenced in the further development of the genre which reverted to the white, heterosexual normative paradigm. The sub-genre's Atlanticist orientations display the tensions of the real world shift in European attitudes to the Atlantic alliance in ever-increasing layers of anti-American sentiments in the genre, indicative of a community of readers not bounded by nation-state affiliations, the white Atlantic rom-com audience. The discussion and examples suggest that discursive construction of the cinematic white Atlantic both reflects and constructs the discourse of white Atlanticism, and is not a fixed entity but a flexible cultural form which is continually reshaped in discourse.

## Post-9/11 Anxiety and New Atlantics

This chapter will argue that post 9/11 there has been a repositioning of White Atlanticism and that the narrative of white masculine crisis has become a trope for the re-articulation of the White Atlantic. It will be suggested that the Atlanticist paradigm identified in the previous chapter became untenable post 9/11, as the Atlantic alliance, including the so-called Special Relationship, came under scrutiny and was weakened. The previous chapter explored this dimension in relation to *Love Actually*. The texts chosen for close-reading are *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, US/UK, 2006), *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, US/Germany/Czech Republic, 2002) and *Fight Club* (David Fincher, US/Germany, 1999). These texts have been selected in part because each departs from a position which assumes a prior understanding of the transatlantic romance as developed in the transatlantic rom-coms. However, they have also been selected because of their congruence of overlapping themes of renewal. In particular, it will be argued that the narrative of *Fight Club* interrogates the politics of White Atlantic paradigms via the trope of white masculine crisis which displays genealogical continuities pre- and post-9/11. It will also be suggested that it is possible to read *Fight Club* as an ironic take on the transatlantic Romantic-Comedy. Each of the three films is concerned with the discontents of white, straight masculinity and involves the protagonist in a search for a new white self. In each case, this search is located within a transatlantic triangulation to produce a specific version of post 9/11 White Atlanticism; and in each case, the romance narrative is central to the film's white Atlanticist positioning. The films chosen capture, in their articulation of these themes, elements of the transatlantic context of their production. In order to contextualise the case studies the chapter will return to conversations about the crisis of white masculinity which informed critical debate in the 1990s, and which were touched on in the previous chapter in relation to the transatlantic romantic-comedy. The chapter will



revisit Pfeil's discussion of the action movie sub-genre, the male rampage movie, which Pfeil reads as expressive of a crisis of white masculinity, in order to trace a genealogy from this sub-genre to the case studies which follow. It will be suggested that the cinematic repositioning of the White Atlantic in *Fight Club*, *The Bourne Identity* and *Children of Men*, is articulated via intertextual references to the discourses of white masculine, anxiety and resentment expressed in the earlier action genre. This current discussion will revise and reinterpret these discourses from a transatlantic frame of reference, to suggest the overlapping resonance of discourses about masculinity, nationhood and transnational paradigms. It will be suggested that *Children of Men* and the *Bourne* franchise, capture a new, post-9/11 White Atlanticist mood. However, it is important to note a cautionary caveat regarding 9/11 as a singular prime mover in the production of this *zeitgeist*. Rather, it is the suggestion here that, post 9/11, there are also continuities of mood, tone and structures of feeling which predate the attack on the twin towers. In order to support this view, the discussion will begin therefore with a discussion of *Fight Club* to show how as *Children of Men* and the *Bourne* films express a post-9/11, transatlantic, white, masculine sensibility, then *Fight Club* prefigures that mood in prescient ways.

At the time of its release, *Fight Club*, was understood by many critics as articulating a late '90s convergence of a 'crisis of masculinity' and a 'crisis of whiteness, already in cinematic circulation via a series of nineties representations of white masculinity in crisis in films which included *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, US/UK/France, 1993), *Last Action Hero* (John McTiernan, US, 1993), *Disclosure* (Barry Levinson, US, 1994), and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, US, 1999). In his *Salon* review of *Fight Club*, Andrew O'Hehir claims: 'The late-'90s crisis of masculinity has arrived in pop culture with a vengeance.'<sup>172</sup> The film aroused critical passions, being charged by some with revelling in masochistic

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<sup>172</sup> Andrew O'Hehir, 'Fight Club', [www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/review/1999/10/15/fight\\_club](http://www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/review/1999/10/15/fight_club), 15/10/1999, accessed 8/10/2010

violence and promoting fascism. It is narrated by an unnamed, discontented, white-collar, white male (Ed Norton), who is resentful of his sterile consumer lifestyle and grinding wage-slavery. The narrator's ordinary, albeit aspirationally metrosexual, whiteness is signified in his middle-class job, consumer lifestyle and condo, but most especially in his remaining unnamed, suggesting his (white) everyman quality. He finds temporary solace in a series of men's support groups, but the arrival of vampish Goth, Marla Singer (Helena Bonham-Carter), at 'his' groups disturbs him, as he develops simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion towards her. He eventually finds release in an underground, (white) men only, bare knuckle boxing club, the eponymous Fight Club. Fight Club is led by Tyler Durden, portrayed by Brad Pitt as a charismatic Nietzschean superman, and its growing membership is comprised of angry, white males. However, to the narrator's concern, Fight Club morphs from an after-hours boxing network into a white militia movement, Project Mayhem, with an agenda to bring down corporate America by blowing up the financial sector of the city. The plot ultimately succeeds, despite the narrator's efforts to prevent it, and in the final shot the narrator and Marla, now reunited, watch as the skyscrapers fall in an eerie prefiguring of the collapse of the twin towers.

The film reaped censorship, as violent scenes were cut and some critics were appalled by what they saw as the promotion of neo-fascism. In his denunciation of the film, Alexander Walker in the *London Evening Standard* wrote:

It is an inadmissible assault on personal decency. And on society itself.....It uncritically enshrines principles that once underpinned the politics of fascism, and ultimately sent millions of Jews to the death camps. It echoes propaganda that gave license to the activities of the SA and SS. It resurrects the Fuhrer principle.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Alexander Walker, 'Review: Fight Club', 11.11.1999, *The London Evening Standard*

Perhaps it is the film's ending, or Brad Pitt's portrayal of Tyler Durden as irresistibly magnetic, which fuels Walker's outrage and offers confirmation that the film uncritically promotes fascism. Durden's occupation of making soap from human fat, similarly, was read as anti-Semitic. However, other reviewers saw the film as ultimately condemning fascism, even while exploring its appeal:

While they are manifestly defending civilised values, Fincher and company involve us at a visceral level in the seductive attractions of what the film attacks.<sup>174</sup>

Given that the film ends with the success of a conspiracy to blow up the city, French's assertion that it is 'manifestly defending civilised values' raises interesting questions about the content of these values which will be explored as the discussion progresses. Amy Taubin<sup>175</sup> is also convinced that the film does not promote fascism. She does, however, pin down those elements of attraction which made some critics uncomfortable. In particular, she highlights the homo-erotic charge suggested by Tyler Durden's appeal for the narrator, and by inference, much of the film's audience:

Tyler's nihilism and incipient fascism are not the values *Fight Club* espouses, though Fincher complicates the issue by making Tyler so alluring and charismatic. Tyler is posed as an object of desire and identification - and Pitt...has never been as exquisite as he is with a broken nose and blood streaming down his cut body.... For the protagonist who feels emasculated by his buttoned-down consumerist life, Tyler represents some ideal of free-wheeling male power.<sup>176</sup>

What seems to be revealed in the critical reception is not only a sense that the film chimed with a number of 1990s discourses concerned with masculinity, and specifically, white masculinity; but that what is controversial is the possibility that the carefully policed

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<sup>174</sup> Philip French, 'You Looking at Me?', 14.11.1999, *The Guardian*

<sup>175</sup> Amy Taubin (1999) 'So Good It Hurts', *Sight and Sound*, November, 1999

<sup>176</sup> Amy Taubin, *ibid.*

performance of ordinary, everyday whiteness will tip over into one of 'extreme whiteness'. *Fight Club* manifestly traverses the representational boundaries between these two identities, as we discover that the issue is not simply that the narrator wishes to identify with Tyler Durden, but that he *is* Tyler Durden, as Tyler Durden turns out to be his alter ego. In his interpretation of the film, Paul Watson's reading illustrates a critical position which is unwilling to think about whiteness as a racialised category. Watson takes issue with the claim that *Fight Club* may be read in the context of the discourse of white, masculine crisis. Framing his discussion of the film, Watson's analysis takes issue with what he sees as film scholars' preoccupation with the relation between cinema and politics:

Criticism proceeds as if the impress of socio-political relations can be traced in the textuality of film.<sup>177</sup>

This is a matter explored at greater length in the methodology section of this project. For the purposes here, it is important to consider Watson's claims in relation to the discourse of the crisis of white masculinity. He suggests that a reading of *Fight Club* 'as simply another cultural expression of a white-male, mean-spirited, tantrum, will not do.'<sup>178</sup> He argues that locating the film within the critical discourse of white masculinity in crisis circumscribes the available critical vocabulary and limits critics' ability to 'capture the genuine sense of helplessness, anomie and pain which attends Jack's narrative and clearly affected the film's audience.'<sup>179</sup> The sources of the narrator's pain, according to Watson, are 'sick male psychology and money motivated, name-brand American society.'

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<sup>177</sup> Paul Watson, (2002), 'American Cinema, Political Criticism and Pragmatism: aA Therapeutic Reading of *Fight Club* and *Magnolia*', in Philip John Davies and Paul Wells, (eds), *American Film and Politics from Reagan to Bush Jr.*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press: 25

<sup>178</sup> Paul Watson, *ibid*: 23

<sup>179</sup> Paul Watson, *ibid*: 17

<sup>180</sup> In other words, the narrator's pain is a universal one. Yet, Watson's appeal for universal categories is undermined in his argument by his expressions of grievance about what he regards as the privileging of some 'special-interest' groups in academic discourse:

For in the critical discourse of some contemporary film and cultural criticism, it sometimes seems as if only the pain and suffering experienced by minority, marginalised or oppressed social groups counts as genuine or valid pain.<sup>181</sup>

His comments reflect an unresolved contradiction in his argument: On the one hand it is underpinned by a desire for universal analytical categories, and on the other, for recognition of the pain of those who are not members, in Watson's terms, of a 'minority, marginalised or oppressed social group.' Watson's stance involves a refusal to name whiteness or masculinity as analytical categories because this would then permit the form of criticism which he seeks to repudiate, and undermine his concomitant effort to sustain the universal claims of whiteness. His account displays a desire to keep the boundaries of whiteness policed and a refusal of the possibility of blurred boundaries between ordinary everyday whiteness and extreme whiteness.

In opposition to Watson, it is the contention here that not only is it precisely *Fight Club's* articulation of a *zeitgeist* of white masculine crisis in its tapping of overlapping, metonymically signified narratives of white male resentment and pre-9/11 fears about white militias and home-grown terrorism for its construction of this trope, that resonated with some audiences, but also that the film's ironic figuration of white, male resentment only makes sense if read in terms of racialised whiteness. In other words, its construction of masculinity only has cultural resonance if this is a masculinity which is racially marked, discursively exposing the operation of raced categories. *Fight Club* achieves this racial

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<sup>180</sup> Paul Watson, *ibid*: 17

<sup>181</sup> Paul Watson, *op.cit*: 16

marking by playing on the intertextual trope of white masculine crisis already present in a range of cinematic representations, in which the slippage between whiteness as the default identity and racialised whiteness is crucial to their politics. As part of a consideration of *Fight Club* in a broader cultural context, and specifically cinematic representations of white masculine crisis, the next section will locate *Fight Club* intertextually. It will begin with Pfeil's reading of the 'male rampage' film, then continue with Susan Jeffords's<sup>182</sup> and Jude Davies's<sup>183</sup> discussions of the male transformation narrative, to provide a discursive context for the discussion of *Fight Club* which will follow.

Pfeil traces a discourse of white, male resentment in a sub-genre of the action movie he identifies as the 'male rampage' film. His analysis focuses particularly on the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapons* films of the late '80s and '90s:

Each film... followed the same basic narrative formula: a white male protagonist, portrayed by an actor of proven sex appeal, triumphs over an evil conspiracy of monstrous proportions by eschewing the support and regulation of inept and/or craven law enforcement institutions.<sup>184</sup>

Pfeil delineates the genealogy of this discourse back to what he terms the 'wearisome pathways' of 'frankly reactionary' 1970s films such as the *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, US, 1971) and *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, US, 1974) cycles. The last two were part of a series of 1970s anti-establishment films which, Pfeil argues, came in right cycle and left cycle variants. In Pfeil's account, the right cycle is characterised by an anti-liberal, white, male protagonist who must wage his own war against sundry threatening Others because the authorities are too inept or corrupt to do so. In winning, he recuperates white, straight masculinity against the threatening Other. The left cycle, in contrast, involves a white,

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<sup>182</sup> Jeffords, Susan (1993), 'The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties', in Jim Collins, Hillary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins, (eds), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, New York and London, Routledge: 196-208

<sup>183</sup> Davies, Jude (1995), 'Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Crisis in *Falling Down* and *Groundhog Day*', *Screen*, Vol 36 Number 3, Autumn: 214-233

<sup>184</sup> Pfeil, Fred, (1995) *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*, London & New York, Verso

male protagonist who uncovers corrupt conspiracies of power elites, but who is thwarted or killed before he can expose it. *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, US, 1974), *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, US, 1974) and *Three Days of the Condor* (Sidney Pollack, US, 1975) are typical examples of the left cycle of the genre. The *Rambo* films, and in particular *Rambo: First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, US, 1982), Pfeil suggests, synthesised the right and left cycles of the 1970s anti-establishment film, in introducing the archetype of the lone, wounded, white warrior who is at war with the authorities. In fusing the left and right cycle, *Rambo* crystallised, for Pfeil, what these texts can tell us about:

The irresolutions, anxieties and contradictions sawing away at each other within the constructs and discourses of straight white masculinity.<sup>185</sup>

Pfeil goes on to develop and apply this theme in his analysis of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* film cycles. However, in constructing a genealogy from John Rambo to John McClane and Martin Riggs, Pfeil does not explore a key distinction between Rambo and the latter protagonists. In the casting of Sylvester Stallone, *Rambo: First Blood* marks its protagonist as a non-WASP, or in Jacobsen's terms<sup>186</sup>, a 'white ethnic'. In the narrative conflict which ensues, between Rambo and a hostile police force of small town, middle America, Rambo's white ethnic hero is pitted against the establishment in the shape of WASP villains of uncompromised whiteness. The suggestion here is that *Rambo: First Blood* may be understood in the context of ethnic revival, as elaborated by Jacobsen<sup>187</sup> and as discussed in the opening chapter to this project; a reading which offers a more complex, racialised, genealogical descent for *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* than that proposed by Pfeil. In Jacobsen's account the ethnic revival involved, amongst other things, non-WASPS intentionally distancing themselves from the history of white

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<sup>185</sup> Pfeil Fred, op.cit: 2

<sup>186</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobsen (1998), op.cit

<sup>187</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobsen, ibid.

oppression in the US. In *Rambo: First Blood*, the victimised white ethnic, represented by John Rambo, is opposed to the 'blood-soaked Nordic American'<sup>188</sup>, signified by the therefore-coded-as-racist, white police officer played by John Dennehy. From the discursive perspective of ethnic revival, it is via the marking of Rambo's ethnicity that the redundancy of left and right narratives is made possible, in that the establishment, whether of left or right leanings, is white, and therefore inevitably privileged, and inevitably supremacist. However, in the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, the narrative of white ethnic victimhood is erased, as the rhetorical language of victimhood is appropriated for McClane and Riggs in the construction of them as 'good' white guys. This construction is achieved in part via the bi-racial 'buddy' trope as McClane and Riggs are coded as white in relation to their black buddies Al Powell and Roger Murtaugh respectively. The ambiguities of these bi-racial buddy dyads, and their narrative recuperation of white male privilege at the expense of a black sidekick have been explored in some detail elsewhere,<sup>189</sup> but what is germane to this discussion is their role in constructing the white hero's persona. As Vera and Gordon<sup>190</sup> suggest, the role of the black sidekick is to connote the hero's whiteness as goodness. This coding of the hero's 'good' whiteness, is further reinforced and coded as 'ordinary everyday whiteness' by its contrast with the 'extreme whiteness' of the villains McClane and Riggs thwart. Nor does Pfeil consider the transatlantic significance of the villains' identity coding. For example, the arch villain of *Die Hard*, played by British actor Alan Rickman, is presented as a camped-up version of Nordic whiteness. Named Hans Gruber, his German accent and non-diegetic musical motif of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* manage to reference and conflate Nazi associations and the EU at the same time. The narrative effect is to fix McClane as representative of ordinary everyday whiteness, and further to construct this identity as the default American identity.

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<sup>188</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobsen, op.cit.

<sup>189</sup> Ed Guerrero (1993), 'The Black Image in Protective Custody: Hollywood's Biracial Buddy Films of the Eighties' in *Black American Cinema*, Manthia Diawara (ed), London, Routledge: 237-247; Hernan Vera and Andrew M. Gordon (2003), *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield

<sup>190</sup> Vera & Gordon, op.cit



In this, *Die Hard* follows a longstanding pre-9/11 trope of European, and especially British baddies, both of which the coding of Hans Gruber references, and refuses the white Atlantic trope, by making Europe the extreme Other to its default whiteness.

In appropriating the narrative of injustice expressed by Rambo for 'ordinary everyday whiteness', the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films incorporate into the already present narrative of white resentment a narrative of justification, as opposition to white supremacy has been appropriated and ventriloquised for McClane and Riggs. In the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, ordinary every day whiteness lies in the space between non-whiteness and extreme whiteness, but it is opposed to extreme whiteness. In contrast, *Fight Club* makes knowing use of the biracial buddy dyad to represent the slippage from ordinary to extreme whiteness. This is apparent in the scene in *Fight Club* when the black detective, Stern, talks to the narrator on the 'phone, echoing the 'phone conversations between McClane and Powell in *Die Hard*. Stern's tone is concerned, like Powell's before him. However, unlike McClane and Powell, the protagonist of *Fight Club* and Stern do not team up. Instead, in a subversion of the narrative and generic formulae of the rampage film, the protagonist-narrator becomes a sidekick to the archetypal rampager, Tyler Durden, whose rampager credentials reach parodic heights in his performance of the suffering of the white masculine body. The knowing construction of Tyler Durden as combining *both* the male rampage and extreme whiteness archetypes is the most overt reference to *Fight Club*'s intertextual descent from *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* and is a key signifier of its playing with and ironising of both, as on the one hand, *Fight Club* departs from the rampage genre by constructing the buddy dyad not as bi-racial but as a duality of ordinary whiteness and extreme whiteness. However, on the other hand, it utilises the trope of the 'divided white self' revived in *Die Hard*. The 'divided white self' is a

theme identified by Vera and Gordon<sup>191</sup> in the American Civil War genre, in which it is used to elaborate a split in the white self. The Civil War genre, suggest Vera and Gordon, is not concerned with conflict between black and white, but with white versus white. *Fight Club* alerts us to the use of this trope in the narrative marginalisation of the potential black sidekick, and the narrator's identification with Tyler Durden, to construct both a literal and metaphorical split white self, between ordinary and extreme whiteness. These versions of white masculinity are narratively represented in *Fight Club* via the binarism of rampage/domestication. In this, the trope of the split white self usurps the binarism of white rampage/black domestication of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* films, identified by Pfeil and others. The white male rampage / white male domestication binarism of *Fight Club* becomes a mechanism for marking *Fight Club's* intertextual descent from another 1990s trope of straight, white masculinity in its enactment of a male transformation narrative.

This sub-genre, identified by Jeffords in a number of 1990s films such as *Regarding Henry* (Mike Nichols, US, 1991), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, US, 1991), and *City Slickers* (Ron Underwood, US, 1991), marks a shift in the representation of masculinity, away from the hard-fighting male heroes of the 1980s, such as Rambo and Indiana Jones, towards gentle family men. She suggests that the emergence of this sub-genre is positive to some degree, but argues that ultimately the association of gentleness with family and domesticity, as well as the exclusive whiteness of the narratives affirms ultimately their conservative notions of race and gender. The white, male protagonists' suffering is understood as being a result of individual biography, erasing historical inequalities of race and gender. A consequence of this erasure is that the hero's transformation into gentleness serves to further buttress his privileged position. Jude

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<sup>191</sup> Vera & Gordon, op.cit.

Davies<sup>192</sup> considers the implications of the subversion of this sub-genre in his analysis of white masculinity in crisis in *Falling Down*. Davies argues that the film reverses the earlier transformation narratives, in that the protagonist, known only as D-FENS, is pushed to violence in order to overcome obstacles to him returning to his home and family. Like the narrator in *Fight Club*, his unnamingsignifies, on the one hand, his broken and now decentred status, however this combines with the overt signification of D-FENS as white and middle-class to mark his identity as one of ordinary whiteness. *Falling Down* goes some way, argues Davies, to redefining racial difference into relations of class.

Nevertheless, as with its racially conservative counterparts, the film reinforces traditional gender roles by continually identifying gentleness with femininity and domesticity. *Fight Club* uses the domesticated / rampager binarism to construct its own transformation narrative, and to connect with broader cultural discourses of masculinity such as the 'nineties men's movement. For example, early on, the narrator's domesticity is signified as symbolic of his emasculation. His addiction to the IKEA catalogue is dwelt upon as most emblematic of this. The narrator's self-loathing is expressed in a particular scorn reserved for his domestic consumption:

Like so many others I had become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct. I'd flip through catalogues and wonder what kind of dining set defines me as a person.

His voiceover is accompanied by images of animated pages from the IKEA catalogue filling up empty spaces in his apartment, their names and prices attached; the latter signifying mass production and distribution, even as their marketing extols the products' uniqueness and authenticity, glossing the exploitative conditions of their production:

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<sup>192</sup> Jude Davies (1995), 'Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Crisis in *Falling Down* and *Groundhog Day*', *Screen*, Vol 36 Number 3, Autumn 1995: 214-233

I even had the dishes with the glass bubbles and imperfections - proof that they were hand crafted by the indigenous hardworking peoples of wherever.

In the film's economy of signs, and in its intertextual relays, the narrator's domesticity and its associations with feminisation are an index of his mental and emotional breakdown.

The paradigmatic choice of IKEA as the symbol of this collapse is significant. It sets up one pole of the transatlantic triangulation which structures the narrative. In targeting a European, indeed 'Nordic', MNC as the arch-perpetrator of the narrator's condition, *Fight Club* relays the anti-European trope of the rampage cycle. By associating that trope with themes of domestication and feminisation it also makes discursive connections with the then-circulating messages of the 'nineties men's movement.

One strand of this movement was expressed in Robert Bly's *Iron John*,<sup>193</sup> published in the US in 1990 and an influential men's movement text. A major argument of *Iron John* was that the experience of modern 'soft' masculinity is one of rage, grief and passivity due to its feminisation and a lack of adequate mentoring from older males. Feminisation, it is claimed, has resulted in a lack of self-restraint, resilience and backbone. The Bly thesis is that men need to be re-educated in masculine virtues, and that this can only be achieved by other men, or as Tyler Durden puts it, 'I wonder if another woman is really what we need'. Though the men's movement was by no means a unitary or homogeneous discursive practice a common feature expressed in its literature is a profound and fundamental investment in gender identity. This investment is evident in the offerings of 'nineties masculine self-help books such as *Being a Man: A Guide to the New Masculinity* (1993). They advise the reader that:

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<sup>193</sup> Robert Bly (1990), *Iron John*, New York, Addison Wesley

It is good to be a man. You should be proud to be a man. This simple point can be very difficult to grasp these days. Male pride has been obscured and eroded by the rise of feminism in the last three decades.<sup>194</sup>

*Fight Club* ironises the men's movement discourse in its representation of the narrator's support group tourism. Suffering in turns from insomnia and narcolepsy he sees a doctor, complaining that he is in pain. The doctor is unsympathetic and advises him that if he wants to see real pain he should drop by the testicular cancer support group one evening. So he does, and begins to attend a different therapy group every evening, becoming addicted to the emotional release they give him. He meets Bob (Meatloaf) at the testicular cancer support group, *Remaining Men Together*. Bob now has 'bitch tits' as a result of hormone imbalance since having his testicles removed. In his encounters with Bob, they hug and the narrator is able to cry. For a while his insomnia and narcolepsy are cured. He thinks he has found the answer to his pain. As he is enveloped in Bob's immense breasts, Bob says: 'We're still men'. The narrator nods his agreement, repeating, yes, we're still men. However, when Marla Singer turns up at the testicular cancer group, once again the narrator can neither cry nor sleep. Confronted with his own inauthenticity mirrored by Marla, 'Her lie reflected my lie', his pain tourism becomes unusable. Marla's presence at the group signifies that this is not the route to recuperating his authentic masculinity - if that was not already clear from the too-insistent tone of the group title *Men Remaining Men*, and Bob's pleading that he too remains a man. Bob is a literal and figurative sign of feminisation; other men at the support groups speak of their suffering, rage and grief, at the loss of their former status and abandonment by women who now 'have it all'. These representations chime with the men's movement theme of modern 'soft' masculinity as an experience of rage, grief and passivity. The men at the support groups are irredeemably emasculated, an idea reinforced by Marla's character figuratively

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<sup>194</sup> Fanning, Patrick, and Matthew McKay. (1993), *Being a Man: A Guide to the New Masculinity*, Oakland, CA, New Harbinger Publications: 4

being 'ballsier' than any of them, including the narrator. In *Fight Club*, this version of masculinity is exposed as no more authentic or recuperative than the metrosexual identity the narrator has rejected. Enter Tyler Durden, as the Bly-esque mentor in masculine virtues to perform the necessary redemptive transformation of the narrator. Tyler's initiation of the Fight Club movement creates a men-only space, in which can be performed a version of Robert Bly's ideal of masculinity. In describing the feeling of being involved in Fight Club, the narrator claims it isn't about winning. Rather, it seems, in some quasi-religious way, to be about communing as men. As Pfeil notes, even when they are adversaries, the men of these films:

Compose a community no woman can enter, and share a joy no woman can know. The current of pleasure and affiliation that radiates from this *Brudderbund* of rampagers thus runs across and against these films' structured oppositions.<sup>195</sup>

However, a significant narrative point which undercuts the theme of men communing as men and suggests its mythology is one in the narrator savagely beats up a blonde boy who has become a favourite with Tyler. The boy has the iconic looks of Aryan imagery, a coding which further serves to associate Tyler Durden's Fight Club, and by extra-textual association, the '90s men's movement, with neo-fascism, another white Atlanticist paradigm. The beating fulfils some important narrative and discursive functions. Firstly, it shows the narrator failing to satisfy the *Iron John* virtues of self-discipline and self-restraint and implies the potential for the fantasy of 'masculine' virtue to tip over into vice.

Secondly, it uses the homo-erotic theme, rehearsing the long-standing trope which links fascism and homo-eroticism, to represent fascism as both seductive and threatening; this ambivalence is expressed in the narrator's sentiment that he wanted to destroy something beautiful. Before we discover that Tyler and the narrator are the same person, the scene is read as indicative of the narrator's homoerotic desire for Tyler. Once it is revealed that

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<sup>195</sup> Fred Pfeil (1995), op.cit.: 12

the narrator is also Tyler, and that Tyler is an hallucination, it complicates the beating of the blonde boy. It seems it is the narrator's own homoerotic desires which are suppressed and the beating is a symptom of homophobic self-loathing, made acceptable by its smuggling in the guise of crushing Aryan Nazism. In the narrator's journey of transformation his rejection of both of these elements is therefore linked, and his rejection of extreme whiteness is also one of reconfirming heterosexuality. The visual coding of the boy recalls earlier cinematic representations of Aryan youth as beautiful but monstrous, in *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, US, 1972), and even *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, US, 1964), for example. His coding confirms a reading of Project Mayhem as a white Atlanticist sign opposed to the white Atlanticism symbolised by IKEA, a theme which will be explored in the next section.

The layers of narrative opposition and slippage represented by the narrator and Tyler Durden are further complicated by their location in an overlapping discourse of 'good' and 'bad' capitalism. The opening scenes recount the narrator's psychological disintegration and emotional collapse, suggesting it is a result of his entrapment in a cycle of capitalist consumption and wage-slavery. His job of recall calculator for a car firm is morally bankrupt and the routine is stultifying. Of his boss, he remarks, 'if it's Tuesday he's wearing his cornflower blue tie'. The flipside of his wage-slavery is his seduction by commodity fetishism and thralldom to brand-name consumption. A close-up shot of a Starbucks coffee cup cuts to an image of him, zombie-like, watching as the photocopier churns out sheet after sheet: 'Everything's a copy of a copy', he intones. Images and dialogue offer a metaphor for mass production and consumption, and the literal copying process is suggestive of corporations' appropriation of once high cultural forms for commodification on 'Planet Starbucks'. The sequence name-checks IBM and Microsoft as well as Starbucks and IKEA as perpetrators. It is noticeable however, that the targets

of the narrator's spleen are corporations which have risen to prominence in the new post-industrial era in the West; icons of the knowledge and service industries which have shaped the shift to the so-called 'weightless' economy. In the film's economy of signs they are implicated in the emasculation of the narrator, and by inference with that of white masculinity. The inference is that the globalisation of production and consumption, with the export of heavy industry, has led to the demise of traditional masculinity and made American men 'soft'. The counterpoint to the 'weightless' economy, is the hands-on, traditional forms of blue-collar manufacturing that Tyler Durden (re) introduces to the narrator. The meeting with Tyler Durden, dressed, as one reviewer noted,<sup>196</sup> like Huggy Bear, significantly, referencing the 1970s, offers a return to a version of 'hard' masculinity via both the Fight Club movement, and a return to forms of masculine work last prevalent in the 1970s, before the deregulation of Reaganomics and accelerated globalisation. Tyler's rejection of personal grooming and eschewing of contemporary fashion speak of his refusal of metrosexual aspiration just as his filthy and dilapidated home opposes the sterile domestic consumption of the narrator's apartment. Tyler's speech sums up his anti-corporate philosophy: 'Working for jobs we hate, to buy shit we don't need.' His rhetoric references the shift of manufacturing to global multinationals located Not-Here, as Pfeil puts it, and their strategy of making consumers out of the West. In this, *Fight Club* turns the narrative of anti-capitalist resentment, previously explored in *Falling Down*, away from small time business and immigrants. In *Falling Down*, for example, the Korean shopkeeper is elided with those multinational villains, McDonald's, in the narrating of the protagonist's sources of grievance. In contrast, *Fight Club* keeps its sights on the corporate world as the enemy. In this it offers, via Tyler Durden, a fusion of the left and right versions of the rampager, as he combines a Marxist analysis with a neo-fascist sensibility. As already noted, special contempt is reserved for IKEA. It is his enslavement to the IKEA catalogue which engenders the narrator's self-loathing, and 'IKEA boy' is Tyler

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<sup>196</sup> Andrew O'Hehir, op.cit.



Durden's sneering epithet for him. In this, Tyler Durden links the narrator's domestication with a Europeanising white Atlanticism. Tyler Durden's conflation of capitalism and Europeanisation chimes with the white militia discourse, identified by Pfeil and discussed earlier in this project. Its appeal is based on nostalgia for an imagined pre-globalised 'American' capitalism, for which Tyler Durden is a poster boy, as, in contrast to the global reach of the transnational corporations, Tyler Durden's small-scale soap industry is local, and recycles available resources. However, his apparent source of income is handled sardonically, as we learn that the soap is made from the fat of women, extracted by liposuction, a sign of Western over-consumption displaced onto femininity. It undermines, on more than one level, the idea of the weightless economy, but specifically suggests Tyler's Durden's industry is dependent on the waste products of consumer capitalism. That he then sells the soap back to the same women via smart cosmetics counters in upscale department stores further implicates him in the system his rhetoric opposes. In a further undermining of Tyler Durden's local capitalist philosophy, as we have already seen, the narrator is employed by a 'traditional' manufacturer in a role which recalls the *Ford Pinto* scandal, a case in which it emerged that the *Ford Pinto* car's fuel tank was likely to explode in a rear-end collision. *The Ford Motor Company* decided it would be cheaper to pay off possible lawsuits in the event of deaths than to pay for a redesign. These narrative associations go some way towards puncturing the narrative of nostalgia for the era of pre-globalisation. These pro- and anti-white Atlanticist paradigms structure the film's complication of simplistic notions of 'good' and 'bad' capitalism, and are transcended by an alternative white Atlantic in the film's resolution.

Marla Singer is the key to this transcendence via the narrator's rejection of Tyler's project and redemption. This is signalled in the opening scene, when, with Tyler Durden's gun in his mouth, his voice-over tells us it 'all' has something to do with Marla Singer. The point

is made: She is central to the narrator's narrative journey. Early on, when Marla's appearance at the support groups makes him inhibited, he suggests that they split the groups, so they won't turn up to the same sessions. Yet, though he rejects her, he nevertheless contrives to obtain her phone number, ostensibly in case they ever need to rearrange. Nevertheless, her presence is the catalyst for him to realise that support group tourism isn't the answer to his search for meaning. Later, when his condo is blown up in a 'mysterious' explosion, he almost calls Marla, before fatefully calling Tyler Durden instead. However, it is Marla who begins the process of bringing him back from Project Mayhem. She reminds him of the people they knew from the support groups, some of whom have died. Later, she calls him when they are estranged and asks him to check her breast for a lump. He is unwilling, but does so grudgingly; properly realising for the first time that she is poor. This ironises his discontents, as every step of the way he has been able to be economically viable, and can continue to be so, as he realises he can get paid for keeping quiet about what his company does. Marla's promptings are the beginning of his transformation from resentful narcissist, as small seeds of empathy are sown. When Bob is killed on a Project Mayhem mission, the narrator is horrified that no-one in the militia knows his name. This was Robert Paulson, he tells them. They repeat the phrase, like automatons, encapsulating a fascistic trope of individual identity being absorbed into the whole and negated. It is at this point that his transformation is evident, but the process began earlier, when he started to see Marla, and others, as people with needs too. In the end Tyler Durden is a creature invented by the protagonist to express his rage and misogyny. He has finally silenced Tyler Durden, and is back in control of his self, and, we are to understand, no longer feels rage and misogyny. However, he is too late to stop Project Mayhem. In the final shot, he and Marla hold hands, in Goth fashion, suggesting innocence and equality, and even cross-gender identification. They watch the corporate towers collapse, symbolising renewal as 'we all start again' without power, privilege or

debt. So the film finally returns to the leftist anti-establishment plots of the 1970s. Tyler Durden's misogynistic neo-fascism is rejected, and unlike the '70s versions, there is a new resolution: the anti-capitalist plot succeeds and the narrator, the hero after all, doesn't die.

Marla's part in his transformation does offer a replaying of the association of femininity with gentleness, and further makes this association with Goth culture in the context of its demonising in the aftermath of Columbine. However, it subverts the association of femininity with domesticity. Marla's appearance as a vampish Goth works against that reading, as does her acceptance of the gothic squat that the narrator/Tyler Durden inhabit. In this she also passes the test of anti-consumerism; 'trivial' consumerism being a trope frequently displaced onto femininity in male crisis narratives, such as *American Beauty*, for example, and a trope which *Fight Club* uses to ironic effect in Durden's soap manufacture. Not only does Marla's signification as a Goth militate against her domestication and consumerism, but it also associates her with a philosophical outlook beyond shallow materialism, more concerned with existential questions; and significantly for the argument here, it signifies her as a white Atlanticist figure, referencing Goth's origins in England amongst white youth, and the transatlantic circulation of its ethos, again amongst whites. The narrator's transformation, and recuperation of straight, white masculinity is achieved via a refusal of both the hegemonic corporate white Atlantic and its isolationist opposite. Instead, the narrator embraces a white Atlantic of renewal, an ending which suggests that whiteness itself needs to start again, without privilege. However, while it seems as if *Fight Club* has articulated a subversive discourse, rejecting white privilege, its heterosexual romance appears to remain white Atlanticist. This is apparent, not only in Marla's construction as a Goth, but in combining that sign with the structure of the romance narrative which mirrors that of the romantic comedy genre, in the attraction/ repulsion of opposites, their falling out, and final reuniting. This may be read as ultimately serving to

recentre whiteness. However, in the process he has been transformed, so the use of the romantic-comedy genre may be read as a mechanism for that transformation, and so reinforcing the message of the film that it is whiteness itself that must change.

It is difficult to imagine *Fight Club* being released post- 9/11. Partly, this is because, post-9/11, the feelings of resentment and self-pity expressed by a relatively privileged protagonist were less likely to chime with audiences, even if treated ironically, but also for the evident reason that a film which presents the blowing up of corporate towers as a happy ending would be untenable in the post 9/11 *zeitgeist*. Immediately after 9/11, films critical of America or of white Atlanticist hegemony were pulled. However, *The Bourne Identity* (2002), it will be argued, smuggled in a critical reading of America and of the hegemonic White Atlantic paradigm.

*The Bourne Identity* was released in Europe and the US just short of a year after 9/11, and elsewhere shortly afterwards. During that year there was pressure on Hollywood to support the 'War on Terror', and in particular to not release films which showed Americans and America in a bad light - though how the latter is defined is of course highly contingent on who is doing the defining. Two examples will serve to illustrate the mood of producers. The release of *The Quiet American* (Philip Noyce, Germany/US/UK/Australia/France, 2002), which had been ready for release around the time of 9/11, was postponed. The film dealt with CIA involvement in terrorist attacks on civilians in Vietnam in the 1950s. It was only released twelve months later, after a campaign by its star, Michael Caine. In contrast, the patriotic *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, US, 2001), about military comradeship, was rushed into release ahead of schedule. In November 2001, Karl Rove had held meetings with Jack Valenti, the director of the Motion Picture Association of America and leaders of the major Hollywood studios and television networks, to discuss how Hollywood could use

its 'persuasion skills' to help the war effort. *The Bourne Identity* appears not to have had political pressure brought to bear on the production, perhaps due the soothing content of film's publicity material. In fact, however, Douglas Liman's film presents a critique of American unilateralism, of the CIA and its role in Europe, and of the hegemonic White Atlantic paradigm. Or, since the Bush administration were about to bypass the CIA, and set up alternative, more accommodating intelligence sources,<sup>197</sup> perhaps they were content to see the CIA attacked. Whatever the reasons, the film's promotional material and reviews made the film seem uncontroversial, referring to Bourne as the 'American James Bond'. The association of Bourne with Bond has discursive significance beyond the marketing of a genre. Until the recent *Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, UK/US, 2008), the Bond franchise had been overtly Atlanticist in orientation, and represented an effort to construct a transatlantic product, with the so-called special relationship as an underlying premise of Bond's diegesis. The tag of 'American Bond' would imply that Bourne offers a confirmation of this premise. However, it will be argued here that *The Bourne Identity* goes to some lengths to construct Bourne as not-Bond, and uses the spy thriller genre to locate the lone white hero in a search for a new Atlanticist identity in the context of a re-structuring of the hegemonic white Atlantic.<sup>198</sup> A realignment of transatlantic political allegiances and tensions took shape as G.W.Bush and Blair worked to create the 'coalition of the willing' which would go on to provide the military support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. France and Germany's opposition to the invasion and their unwillingness to sanction it without further UN authorisation created a split in the EU and NATO over the invasion and over the nature of the transatlantic alliance. However, the shift in European attitudes to America seems to predate the build-up to the war, and

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<sup>197</sup> Julian Borger, 'The Spies Who Pushed for War', *The Guardian*, 17 July 2003

<sup>198</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Ilona Teleki, *America's New Allies: Central-Eastern Europe and the Transatlantic Link*, Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, Washington DC, 2006; Federico Romero, (2007) 'The Twilight of American Cultural Hegemony: A historical Perspective on Western Europe's distancing from America', in David Farber (ed) *What They Think of Us: International Perceptions of the United States Since 9/11*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford

coincides with the election of G.W. Bush to the White House. Romero suggests that between the Kosovo action of 1999 and 9/11, an anti-American sentiment resurfaced in Western Europe, and that despite the media's representation of an outpouring of sympathy in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, this anti-American sentiment remained the stronger undercurrent. Romero recalls that in April 1999, the NATO alliance, 'keystone of Euro-American co-operation'<sup>199</sup>, waged war on Serbia's Milosevic. It was a war, he suggests, which overturned the longstanding European view of international order as based on the nation-state as sacrosanct, and placed primacy on democratic universalism and human rights. In this, Clinton and the European leaders, 'representatives of a 'baby boom' generation that had finally found its way into the halls of government'<sup>200</sup> were singing from the same songbook. The change in European attitudes to the US is explained by Romero partly in terms of the unequal intra-Western distribution of power. Though this was not a new circumstance; what had changed was the Bush administration's unilateralism, and a dismissive attitude to European governments which made plain the 'glaring inequality'<sup>201</sup> of the transatlantic alliance. According to Romero, Western Europeans topped the polls in resentment of US power. Added to this resentment was a new European feeling of distance from American values and culture:

Most importantly, what has emerged is a sense that European citizens at large, as well as the professional, intellectual and political elites now claim a moral superiority over the United States.<sup>202</sup>

Suddenly, with the election of Bush, a major rift in values between Europe and America became apparent. *The Bourne Identity* reflects this new transatlantic context and displays an Atlanticist ambivalence, secured via the plot, dialogue and mise-en-scene. Together,

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<sup>199</sup> Federico Romero,(2007), 'The Twilight of American Cultural Hegemony: A Historical Perspective on Western Europe's Distancing from America', in David Farber (ed) *What They Think of Us: International Perceptions of the United States Since 9/11*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford: 153

<sup>200</sup> Federico Romero, *ibid*: 154

<sup>201</sup> Federico Romero, *ibid*: 156

<sup>202</sup> Federico Romero, *ibid*: 156

these three offer significations of place which speak directly of the transatlantic political context of the film's production.

From the start, *The Bourne Identity* sets up a transatlantic narrative opposition. It begins in Southern Europe, south of Marseilles, where the protagonist, a displaced white American and former CIA black ops assassin is rescued from the sea, by the crew of an Italian fishing trawler. At first unconscious, after being shot twice in the back, he wakes to find he has amnesia. The crew takes care of him and club together to give him clothes and money. The film then cuts to the contrasting space of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Here it is suggested that the protagonist failed to complete his last mission, an assassination for Operation Treadstone, a CIA black ops project. As a result, the CIA, and Treadstone's boss, Alex Conklin, want him dead. Conklin's operation is run from a surveillance panopticon from which, via banks of technology and its operators, he is apparently able to scrutinise anywhere in Europe. Operation Treadstone represents the unequal white Atlantic paradigm of the new post-Bush unilateralism. From the outset, the association of each of these spaces with a pole of difference is a signpost of the way in which the representation of place will be important in structuring the narrative, and, it will be argued, in alluding to the broader transatlantic political context. The failed mission is the assassination of Nykwana Wombosi, a deposed African dictator, now based, with his entourage, in Paris. Wombosi has become a thorn in the American strategic foreign policy side by threatening to expose CIA corruption in Africa. He too, is represented as displaced, and his presence in Paris serves to give the city some figurative associations. On the one hand, it refers to both real world and cinematic tropes of Paris as a place of sanctuary for exiles, and in the post-9/11 context, it is also suggestive of Paris as a site of resistance to US hegemony. However, the figure of Wombosi is also used to construct white/black binaries which serve to mark both Paris and the CIA as white. His narrative

opposition to the CIA marks its whiteness, while Wombosi's displacement also works to mark the whiteness of the diegetic space of Paris. The narrative effect of these overlapping discourses of transatlantic tension and whiteness is to suggest a reading of the white Atlantic in terms of the divided white self, referencing new tensions between Europe and America.

The trope of white versus white is deployed from the opening sequence in scenes which reference both themes and visual imagery of the Frankenstein story, an *urtext* of the trope of the divided white self. After the protagonist, as yet unnamed, is rescued, a member of the boat's crew works on his unconscious body removing bullets from two gunshot wounds. The makeshift operating table, and the way in the protagonist suddenly wakes and turns on the 'doctor' recalls the scene from Frankenstein, when the creature wakes to find himself in a state of ontological terror. The Frankenstein imagery is present from the opening long shot of the silhouetted body, apparently suspended in space, made to glow by intermittent lightning flashes. Though the location is the Mediterranean, South of Marseilles, the monochromatic blues and sleeting rain evoke a Northern gothic sensibility. Read in the context of the film's economy of signs, the scene reinforces the protagonist's displacement. The body, seen from the fishing trawler, turns out not to be suspended in space, but floating on the surface of the water. The image expresses not only the idea of death, as the body is unmoving, but birth, as the body in the waters evoke the image of a foetus in a swirling amniotic fluid. The allusions to Frankenstein are suggestive not only of death and rebirth, but are also open to inferences of the hubris and transgression of Victor Frankenstein, the creature's creator, as the subtitle of Mary Shelley's novel, *The Modern Prometheus*, has been interpreted. As the plot develops, a potential narrative correspondent to Victor Frankenstein emerges in Alex Conklin, boss of Operation Treadstone, who dispatched the protagonist to kill Wombosi, though, as we learn later in



*The Bourne Ultimatum*, Bourne's 'creator' is another. Nevertheless, both are from black ops. The Frankenstein references are furthered by the protagonist's journey to Switzerland to investigate the only clue to his origin, an implant, found in his hip, which contains details of a numbered Swiss bank deposit box. The allusions to Frankenstein signal the theme of the divided white self, and suggest that it will be the duality of the Bourne protagonist that drives the narrative. His journey from Southern to Northern Europe invokes a North/South binarism which recalls the trope of imperialist Nordic whiteness and its opposite Other. The journey is represented as his first step to discovering his identity, and confirms the film's concern with whiteness, as his journey into Nordic whiteness is signified by the snowy *mise-en-scene* of his train journey and arrival in Zurich.

The theme of the divided white self is sustained, and the content of Bourne's whiteness is explored, in the construction of Bourne's alter ego, John Michael Kane. In the Zurich bank, the protagonist discovers a deposit box containing a passport which names him as Jason Bourne, with an address in Paris. The homophone with 'born', is irresistibly apt, and sustains the Frankenstein allusion, as does the connection to Paris. However, no sooner does he name himself Jason Bourne, than he finds in another compartment of the deposit box, along with hundreds of thousands of dollars and a handgun, an array of passports each offering a different identity and nationality. The camera focuses on the name of John Michael Kane, the identity under which Bourne had planned to kill Wombosi, and a name which signifies North European whiteness. The narrative emphasis on these two identities, Kane and Bourne, once again references the divided white self, suggesting both their opposition and kinship. The Kane identity may be read as emblematic of white imperialism in its association with Northern whiteness, a reading reinforced by its narrative role. A scene towards the end of the film suggests that the Kane identity is a tool in

maintaining US global reach. The scene links it to the incipient imperialism of the white Atlantic hegemony, and tackles the constructions of whiteness as invisible and as lacking content.<sup>203</sup> When Bourne confronts Conklin in the CIA Paris safe house, Conklin tells Bourne that they could send anyone simply to *kill* Wombosi, but they want Wombosi killed in such a way that it looks as though his own people did it; that Bourne has been picked because he is invisible:

You're a malfunctioning \$30m weapon. I send you to be invisible. I send you because you don't exist.

The scene is suggestive of white invisibility as a weapon in maintaining privilege and dominance. It also critiques the idea of whiteness as lacking content, working to represent the content of whiteness as imperialist. If in the diegesis these connotations of whiteness are attached to the Kane identity, in contrast, the Bourne identity may be read as representing whiteness as emptiness. This association is signified in a number of ways. There are frequent shots of him gazing into mirrors and windows, at his own reflection, metaphorically seeking to recognise himself. Most importantly, his amnesia marks his whiteness as empty. In this reading, the Kane/Bourne opposition suggests that whiteness without imperialism has no content. Or in other words, the content of whiteness is imperialism. The suggestion here is that the Kane/Bourne opposition to be signified in terms of guilt and innocence, respectively, so that paradoxically, Bourne's whiteness is associated with innate goodness. Partly, this positioning is an effect of the early scenes, when, via his clothes and diffident manner, Bourne is coded to look like a preppy College kid traveling around Europe, rather than a trained assassin. The effect is enhanced by Matt Damon's countenance and physique, which retain an adolescent appearance in the first Bourne film. The knowledge that he has killed people might lead us to lose sympathy

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<sup>203</sup> Richard Dyer (1997), op.cit.

with him. However, conventional narrative devices ensure that we are positioned to forgive him. For example, there are hints early on, in his headaches, that he has been 'programmed'. Equally important is the knowledge that he doesn't want to do it anymore. This allows the audience to sympathise, and feel that he is in a sense innocent. Furthermore, the idea of rebirth, prefiguring redemption, is apparent from the start. Yet, there is a stain upon him, like original sin, so he must work at his redemption. This theme is given full expression in *The Bourne Ultimatum*, in which he 'confesses' his crime to his victims' child. As *The Bourne Identity* narrative unfolds there are several examples of his innate goodness, represented by his desire to protect children. For example, we learn that he couldn't kill Wombosi because Wombosi's children were in the room, and the plot allows us to speculate that his memory loss immediately following the Wombosi mission has a psychological basis, the result of guilt or trauma. The first time he uses a gun after the Wombosi mission is narratively justified by the need to protect the children of Marie's friend Eamon. Most importantly, the romance with Marie provides the opportunity for his essential goodness to be displayed. His love for her is emblematic of his worthiness. He puts her safety first and is ready to give her up to save her. Bourne's goodness is coded as a sign of his renewal, and here the text uses an Africanist subtext to mark this in the significant scene when Bourne fails to assassinate Wombosi. As noted earlier, the presence of Wombosi operates to mark the otherwise white spaces and identities of the text. The scene of the attempted assassination operates to crystallise this idea. It is in this scene that Bourne's whiteness is most marked, and it is the moment he is transformed from Kane to Bourne; from imperialist whiteness to a 'new White man' in Morrison's terms.

In the association of Bourne's redemption with gentleness, it may be argued that *The Bourne Identity* follows the pattern of the male transformation narratives identified by

Jeffords.<sup>204</sup> However, it also reverses that narrative in the manner of *Falling Down*, as discussed by Davies,<sup>205</sup> in that Bourne is prevented from having a domestic life and is pushed to violence by the CIA's pursuit of him. As Davies suggests, in *Falling Down*, this reversal locates the protagonist in the narrative of white masculine victimhood. Like D-FENS, Bourne's white, straight masculinity is represented as fugitive and hunted. In *The Bourne Identity* it provides a justification for his reversion to violence, but unlike *Falling Down*, reconfiguring the white male rampage figure as anti-imperialist, in opposition to the extreme white Other of Kane.

The narrative construction of Bourne as essentially good is central to the film's positioning in relation to the white Atlantic. Bourne's relation to white Atlantic paradigms is constructed as not-Bond and problematised via intertextual reference to Bond's white Atlanticism, and in turn, our understanding of Bourne as good constructs his Others negatively. The earliest reference to Bond is when Bourne names himself as Jason Bourne. Within the spy thriller genre, his initials JB inevitably reference James Bond. However, a closer reading of *The Bourne Identity* undermines an assumption of an affiliation with Bond. The paradigmatic exchange of Bourne for Bond marks Jason Bourne's persona as the antithesis of the urbane, well-groomed and debonair Bond. For example, when Bourne arrives in Zurich, he is seen shivering in the snow without a coat, while waiting for the bank to open. In this scene, wearing a borrowed fisherman's zip-up jumper, he looks like a back-packing, gap year student, waiting for a money transfer from home. In contrast, Bond is always smoothly time-efficient, and sartorially appropriate. Nor do women melt at the sight of Bourne, as they appear to do with Bond. For example, the receptionist at the Zurich bank can barely conceal her distaste for him and his unkempt appearance. Later, when he meets Marie, and offers her \$20,000 to drive him to Paris she is reluctant, but is

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<sup>204</sup> Susan Jeffords, (1993), op.cit.

<sup>205</sup> Jude Davies, op.cit.

broke and cannot say no to the money. Bond would not have to persuade her with cash. His charisma would suffice. Bond is at home in the most sophisticated surroundings, whereas, when Bourne discovers the chic Paris apartment, apparently his home, he and Marie wonder if it can be his. Nor is he secure in the initials JB. His discovery of the array of passports in the safe deposit box suggest that he may no more be Jason Bourne than any of these other identities, and therefore also suggesting that he is not-Bond.

As suggested above, this intertextual relay against Bond has significant Atlanticist connotations, as the Bond franchise confirmed the hegemonic white Atlantic, and in particular, the so-called special relationship. The character of American CIA agent, Felix Leiter, Bond's friend and ally, was emblematic of this. The not-Bond theme recurs towards the film's narrative climax when The Professor, a British Treadstone asset, based in Barcelona, is sent by Conklin to kill Bourne at an isolated French farmhouse where Bourne and Marie are hiding out. It is a significant encounter in that it deploys intertextual readings of Bond, and the working-class alternative to Bond, Harry Palmer to construct Bourne's position in relation to the white Atlantic. The Professor is Bourne's most dangerous opponent, evidenced by his having already assassinated Wombosi, in a Jackal-like fashion. On the one hand, his Britishness inevitably connotes Bond, an association reinforced by his clinical killing of Wombosi. However, he is a Bond who works not for the British Secret Service, but is the creature of the CIA. 'Look what they make you give', he says, fatalistically, with his dying breath. However, in playing the British CIA agent with a demotic accent, along with his raincoat and glasses, Clive Owen's agent is as much reminiscent of Harry Palmer as Bond. Palmer, anti-hero of the 1960s British spy films adapted from the novels of Len Deighton, was not only an anti-hero, but was also perceived as a working class alternative to James Bond. Palmer's anti-Bond, and anti-Atlanticist credentials were secured via plot elements and a mise-en-scene which were the

opposite of those evident in the Bond franchise. In contrast to the Bond diegesis, in Harry Palmer's world, the hegemonic 'special relationship' is refused. For example, in *The Ipcress File* (Sidney J. Furie, UK, 1965), Palmer mistakenly kills an American agent, while another dies in his flat, and Palmer is put under surveillance by American intelligence. The relationship between British and American spies is one of mistrust and suspicion, and in an element likely to appeal to British chauvinism, Palmer is shown to be the better at his job. Bourne's victory over the Professor in the shootout in the snow may offer intertextual satisfactions for readers of the genre in its narrative reversal of Palmer's killing of the American agent, but what is germane to the argument here is, firstly, that the narrative once again references the divided white self, as the two Treadstone agents fight to the death. Secondly, the scene also positions Bourne, and the film, in relation to competing white Atlantic paradigms. The doubling of the Professor as both Bond and Palmer allows Bourne to refuse both Bond's imperialist-Atlanticist diegesis, and Palmer's chauvinistic anti-Atlanticism. Nevertheless, the text, like *Fight Club*, works to secure its favoured Atlantic paradigm, in part via the representation of space, as will be discussed in the next section.

The representation of place is central to the film's transatlantic triangulations and a number of examples from the text will serve to illustrate the ways in which places are given a political connotation in the very specific context of the film's production and distribution. The diegetic Europe of the CIA's penetration is one of grey hues and washed out colours. The filmic Zurich's sunless and dreary skies are matched on the streets by drably dressed individuals, intent on whatever business they have at hand. This is not the Europe of pavement cafes and sophisticated conversation. Rather, it is reminiscent of the representation of Eastern Europe in the cold war thrillers of the 1960s, so reversing the Cold War trope of the East as oppressed and oppressive, instead representing Western

Europe in this way. In the film's discursive regime, it is America's transatlantic reach, as signified by the banks of surveillance technology in the Treadstone operations room, which is responsible for this mood. Rome and Barcelona are represented as spaces of complicity with American imperialism, signified by the two CIA trained assassins, Castel and the Professor, activated to kill Bourne from Rome and Barcelona, respectively. However, Paris is constructed as a site of resistance to Americanism in Western Europe. This is signalled early on after the death of Castel, the Rome agent. After he fails to kill Bourne, Castel jumps from the window of the Paris apartment window, killing himself. The CIA's Paris-based agent minder, Nicolette (Nicky), calls Conklin to let him know:

Nicky: He killed our man.  
Conklin: What, in the apartment?  
Nicky: Yeah.  
Conklin: Well, you got to clean that up.  
Nicky: No, I can't clean it up; there's a body in the streets.  
Conklin: So?  
Nicky: There's police, *this is Paris*.

Nicky's response suggests that in Paris, unlike perhaps almost everywhere else, the CIA, and by implication, America, cannot just carry out Black Ops and cover them up at will, an allusion to the non-diegetic context of the Bush administration's unilateralism, and arguably a cause of the European split in attitudes to the US.<sup>206</sup> As this argument suggests, the significance of the filmic locations is heightened by the context of the film's production. That Paris is not only Bourne's base, but his home is demonstrated in the car chase around Paris in Marie's red Mini when he knows the city well enough to elude the Paris police. Furthermore, his only comment about the Paris apartment is 'Good kitchen', adding further homely connotations. The choice of Paris for Bourne's base may, then, be

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<sup>206</sup> Elizabeth Pond, (2003), *Friendly Fire: The Near-Death of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press & The European Union Studies Association

read as a signifier of his resistance to American hegemony. However, the representation of place also has a broader contextual significance in its signification of white Atlanticism. While the post-9/11 political context associates Paris with a resistance to the contemporary white Atlanticist hegemony, the construction of Bourne as an American in Paris is replete with romantic and historical connotations of both white and black Atlantics. Paris is also a sign of the values on which the US was founded, of democratic universalism and human rights, manifestly trampled on by Conklin and Treadstone. Read in this way, Bourne's connection to Paris references both an earlier transatlantic heritage, and the recent past of European and American convergence of humanitarian values in the 1990s. The diegetic threat to Bourne's connection to Paris, as he and Marie have to leave the city and go on the run from Conklin's assets, may be read as a referring to the real-life threat to a longstanding transatlantic Franco-American connection, and to the principles on which the connection is based. Nevertheless, towards the end of the narrative, Bourne reclaims Paris, as Pont Neuf is the place where Bourne turns the tables on the CIA, has them under surveillance, and takes control of events, suggesting a wish-fulfilment recuperation of the pre-Bush white Atlantic.

The white Atlantic represented by Conklin and Treadstone is not only coded as imperialistic, but as patriarchal. The film is at pains to suggest that Bourne is not. At no point does Bourne affiliate with another male character. As noted earlier, Pfeil suggests that the male rampagers and their villains have kinship in a *Brudderbund* which is simultaneously asserted and refused. However, Bourne's character subverts this element of the genre. In Bourne's encounters with other assets, there is always a distance. As the Professor explains, 'I work alone, like you. We always work alone.' This is partly hinting that the US is a creator of division in Europe, but it also reverses the gender affiliations of the earlier rampage films. In the Bourne films it is cross-gender affiliations which run



across and against the films' other structured oppositions, as in *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) it is Pamela Landy, Deputy Director of the CIA and Nicky Parsons who believe in and help Bourne discover the truth. In *The Bourne Identity*, there are signs of Nicky's impatience with the male hierarchy of the CIA in the way she talks to Conklin, and in the later films, Pamela Landy has to work to overcome the patriarchal hubris of male figures. It is the CIA's masculinist culture, echoing the masculinist persona of Bush, which is signified as part of what is wrong with it, and it is from the patriarchal CIA culture that Bourne's abilities in violence are derived. In contrast, Bourne is coded as sensitive to women, within, inevitably, the requirements of the genre. For example, the scene when Marie drives him to Paris has him interested in listening to her stories about her life. Notwithstanding the narrative alibi of his amnesia, this is an unusual quality in action heroes. Another example comes after the car chase, when she has to change her appearance. His washing and cutting of her hair is both intimate and feminised. However, it is only she who must change her appearance. She is the one who needs protecting, and in this, and in Bourne's relations with Landy and Parsons, he conforms to an idealised archetype of masculine chivalry rather than one of gender equality.

Bourne's relationship with Marie is most significant in supporting the text's construction of its preferred Atlantic paradigm. In contrast to Bourne, Marie's biography is rich. On the journey to Paris she talks about herself and her life, and places she has travelled to and worked. However, there are indications that she is escaping the past. When he tells her of his amnesia, she says, grimly, 'Lucky you'. This suggestion is reinforced by the potted biography the CIA researchers give to Conklin in his panopticon:

Conklin:                      Who the hell is that?

Research Tech: Marie Helena Kreutz. She's 26. Born outside Hanover. Her father was a welder. He died in '87. We still don't have the mother. The grandmother... she's still there in Hanover... it looks like she's the anchor for this little domestic disaster, and there's a step brother. It's tough. The girl's a gypsy and she pops up on the grid here and there but it's chaotic at best. She paid some electric bills in Spain in '95... Had a phone in her name for three months in Belgium in '96. No taxes, no credit.

Conklin: I don't like her.

The term gypsy, though used figuratively, is also used to connote her compromised whiteness. The term is associated with persecution across Europe, and in particular the history of genocide in Germany, an association emphasised by Marie's birthplace, outside Hanover, where the Nazi concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen was located. The term is also used to signify contemporary European ethnic tensions and the recent ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. Marie offends Conklin because she has been beyond reach of his surveillance, and therefore of policing, hence his hostile reaction to her. However, his gut response is visceral and suggestive of racism, further marking his, and hegemonic white Atlanticism as extreme. Her terror on seeing her image amongst Castel's papers speaks of the history of ethnic persecution and marks the US as its inheritor rather than protector. However, the coding of gypsy also suggests an internationalist disregard for national boundaries. Significantly, when Bourne first sees her in the consulate she is trying to get to America. She protests to Bourne that, 'People never do the right thing'. Her insistence on doing the right thing and her internationalism confirm her identification with the values of democratic universalism and human rights with which Bourne is also identified via his connection to Paris. However, her ethnic connotations multiply the ethnic scope of the text's preferred Atlantic paradigm, as does their romance. In the film's romantic resolution, he finds her on Mykonos. Their relocation to Southern Europe is

emblematic of their rejection of Nordic whiteness, and therefore of hegemonic white Atlanticism. The specific choice of Greece is a choice of a country which is 'overwhelmingly anti-US and pro-Arab',<sup>207</sup> further endorsing the film's critique of the hegemonic white Atlantic. That it is Marie who has guided him there serves to create some gender and ethnic counter-balance to the restoration of his white, masculine hero to his rightful place, as the genre demands.

*The Bourne Identity* is positioned to be critical of the white Atlantic which emerged with the election of Bush in 2000. In the rift which appeared within the European NATO allies the film opposes the imperialist white Atlantic of the Anglo-American special relationship, which is signified as controlling and corrupt, by its construction of Bourne as not-Bond. By its connection of Bourne to Paris it locates Bourne's values in the earlier white Atlanticist, Franco-American Enlightenment values of democratic universalism and human rights. However, the relationship between Bourne and Marie signifies the need for the ethnic scope of these values to become inclusive.

The chapter will now consider the cinematic treatment of the white Atlantic some years into the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 'war on terror'. It will be argued that they have led to a conversation in which the transatlantic alliance has been further problematised. It is, however, important first of all to contextualise the discussion, by a consideration of the pressures on the transatlantic alliance, including the special relationship. It has already been noted that with the change in the US administration there was a shift in attitudes towards the US and the transatlantic alliance in Europe, a response to the Bush administration's muscular unilateralism. Blair's attempts to repair the strains in the so-called special relationship between Britain and America were only partially successful as

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<sup>207</sup> Anastassia Tsoukala, (2009) 'Terrorist Threat, Freedom and Politics in Europe', in Patricia Noxolo and Jef Huysmans (eds), *Community, Citizenship and the 'War on Terror'*, Basingstoke, Palgrave-MacMillan: 73

doubts grew about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq.<sup>208</sup> At the same time, there is anxiety about increasing securitisation and surveillance, and the subversion of democracy in the name of security.<sup>209</sup> Associated with this anxiety is evidence that citizenship is increasingly experienced as fragile and precarious, particularly by Muslims in the UK.<sup>210</sup> It will be suggested here that *Children of Men* directly engages with these concerns and with contemporary reservations about the transatlantic paradigm.

*Children of Men* was released in the context of a post-9/11 emergence of a series of dystopic science fiction films including *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, UK, 2002), *Equilibrium* (Kurt Wimmer, US, 2002) *A Scanner Darkly* (Richard Linklater, US, 2006) *The Island* (Michael Bay, US, 2005) and *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, US, 2002). It is plausible to suggest that the proliferation of films in the genre reflect a set of disparate post-9/11 anxieties in the context of the wars on terror, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. However, *Children of Men* homes in on the very specific post-9/11 inflected concerns of securitisation, democracy and human rights in a narrative context of competing Atlanticist paradigms. These are explored via the symbolic meanings attached to characters in the narrative. In the reading of *Children of Men* which follows, it will be assumed that characters, images and events have symbolic meanings beyond strictly narrative functions, in an effort to reflect Cuarón's style which is allusive rather than expository. In particular, the analysis that follows will highlight Cuarón's use of the transatlantic romance motif. It will be suggested that as this motif, when used in *Four Weddings*, alluded to the 90s context of the Blair-Clinton alliance, so in *Children of Men*, its use alludes, in part, to the post-9/11 context of the Blair-Bush alliance; but further than this it interrogates the

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<sup>208</sup> Michael A. Peters, (2005), 'War as Globalization: The 'Education' of the Iraqi People', in Michael A. Peters, (ed), *Education, Globalization, and the State in the Age of Terrorism*, Boulder, Colorado, Paradigm

<sup>209</sup> Henry A. Giroux, (2005) 'Terrorism and the Culture of Permanent War: Democracy Under Siege', in Michael A. Peters, (ed), *Education, Globalization, and the State in the Age of Terrorism*, Boulder, Colorado, Paradigm: 179-201

<sup>210</sup> Marie Gillespie and Ben O'Loughlin (2009), 'Precarious Citizenship: Media and Insecurity in Multicultural Britain' in Patricia Noxolo and Jef Huysmans (eds), *Community, Citizenship and the 'War on Terror'*, Basingstoke, Palgrave-MacMillan: 89-113

politics of competing white Atlanticist paradigms and finds them wanting. The aim is not to attempt to draw out any specific narrative correspondences between the text and context but rather to draw out the symbolic meanings which may be attached to characters and the connections between them. Nevertheless, narratively and thematically, *Children of Men* can be located in the genealogy of white male transformation narratives and also in the narratives of white male victimhood and resentment via the persona of the protagonist. However, it will be argued that, as with *Fight Club* and *The Bourne Identity*, these tropes are revived in the service of critiquing the hegemonic white Atlantic.

The white protagonist, Theo (Clive Owen), is a one-time 'activist', who has lost his faith. Though the content of his former beliefs is not explicitly articulated, it will be suggested here that his lost faith is later signified iconographically and narratively as Christian. In 2027, the future setting of the film, he is a cynical and disillusioned civil servant who lives alone with little human contact, working for the Ministry of Energy. His attitude is one of morose resignation. The sign of Theo, as with the Professor in *The Bourne Identity*, is constructed from a range of inter- and extra- textual signifiers which once more play on a Bond/ not-Bond opposition which, it will be argued, Cuarón utilises in developing his white Atlantic critique. Theo's persona recalls again the working-class Harry Palmer. Like Palmer, he wears an unpretentious raincoat. He is determinedly ordinary, 'bloke-ish', and his speech is demotic. Like Palmer, he unfailingly punctures pomposity and pretension and also like Palmer, he lives in an unglamorous bedsit, grinding the days out in a grey and bureaucratic civil service job. However, the initial construction of Theo's persona also departs in significant ways from Palmer. The 1960s Palmer persona reflected the working-class insouciance which was one of the cinematic motifs of 'Swinging London'. It was an attitude which encompassed a complex relation to a prevailing inverted snobbery, complicated by a lingering sensibility of post-war austerity which overlapped with the

swinging sixties and gained fullest expression in British kitchen sink dramas of the time. In *The Ipcress File*, Palmer's finer appreciation of Mozart, along with his culinary debt to Elizabeth David, demonstrate his innate refinement, and hint at his proto-metrosexuality. In contrast, in *Children of Men*, Theo's pastimes are suggestive of a more proletarian sensibility and refer back to more stereotypical cinematic representations of the consuming pleasures of post-war, British, white, working-class masculinity: the dog track and pints of bitter in the pub. Theo eschews Cappuccino culture, buying coffee only to provide a receptacle for his morning shot of whisky, whereas, Palmer would have embraced it. Nevertheless, Theo's intertextual associations with, and oppositions to, Palmer are heightened by the presence of Michael Caine, the original Harry Palmer, in *Children of Men*, playing the part of Jasper, also surnamed Palmer. Further intertextual relays are suggested by the Palmer reference and the choice of Clive Owen to play Theo. For example, the associations extend further to recall Owen's performance in the cult film *Croupier* (UK, 1998), directed by Mike Hodges, who was also the director of the iconic Michael Caine film, *Get Carter* (UK, 1971). The significance of these intertextual relays for the argument here lies, again, in the anti-Atlanticist sentiment associated with Palmer. As discussed earlier, in relation to the Professor in *The Bourne Identity*, Palmer was not only a working class anti-hero, but was also perceived as an anti-James Bond. In addition, Clive Owen was a one-time contender for Bond, but is now, like Palmer, and Bourne, not-Bond. The metonymic signification of Owen as not-Bond takes on narrative significance in *Children of Men* as Cuarón uses it to allude to tensions in the transatlantic alliance, and in particular the so-called Anglo-American special relationship, as will be discussed shortly. The intertextual links to Palmer, Caine and Hodges heighten not only inter- and extra-textual associations of Theo with 'not-Bond', but allude also, like Tyler Durden, to a 1970s archetype of white, working-class masculinity, in this case, a British one which speaks of disillusionment, in contrast to the insouciant, incipient metrosexuality of 1960s

representations of masculinity. In the contemporary cultural recycling of the 1970s British archetype (see *Life on Mars* (BBC, aired in UK 2008-2009), *The Transporter* (Louis Leterrier/Corey Yuen, France/US, 2002) and its sequels, *The Bank Job* (Roger Donaldson, UK, 2008) etc.), this persona is signified by a cluster of resentments, particularly against ethnic Others and women. Theo displays indifference to the plight of the Foogies and evidences the latter in his relations with Julian, his former partner, and with Miriam, midwife to Kee. His channelling of his resentment towards women is confirmed at a scene in his workplace. Other workers are watching saturation coverage of the Baby Diego story on their desk screens. At the desk opposite from Theo, a white, middle-aged, woman cries as she watches. Her workspace is adorned with personal knick-knacks, icons and symbols including photos, flags, dolls, teddy bears and candles; most prominent is a Union flag. These items encroach onto Theo's side of the desk. Once more the iconography chimes with contemporary experience, as the adorned desk is a familiar workplace sight and the Baby Diego coverage is reminiscent of the mourning of public figures and celebrities since the death of Diana. Theo looks across at the woman critically, clearly irritated by the display of emotionality. His attitude recalls the real world dislike expressed by many to the public response to the death of Diana as being un-British. In the background of the shot we see men looking at screens, no doubt discussing the death, but by focusing on the image of this woman, the text makes her stand for the popular response to the news. She becomes lost in a reverie of sobbing and as the newsreader announces that the mantle of the world's youngest person has passed to a woman, Theo groans and rises from his seat, his impatience with this display of emotionality palpable. His response might be read sympathetically as a distaste for the way in which the sentimental response to the death of Baby Diego is negatively contrasted with the lack of emotional response to the Foogies, and certainly *Children of Men* allows for the suggestion that the media construction of iconic celebrities, such as Diana, as special and

charismatic makes possible the continued implementation of state power. However, we have already seen that Theo doesn't care about the fate of the Foogies either, so his attitude works to confirm his 1970s archetypal status. Theo's morose outlook is summed up in an exchange with Jasper:

Jasper:       What did you do on your birthday?  
Theo:         Nothing  
Jasper:       Oh, come on, you must have done something!  
Theo:         No, same as every other day. Woke up. Felt like shit. Went to work. Felt like shit.  
Jasper:       That's called a hangover, Amigo.  
Theo:         At least with a hangover I feel something.

As suggested, Theo's sullen hostility marks a departure from Harry Palmer's cocksure pleasure in 'putting one over on the bosses'. He displays, for the first half of the film, an attitude which resonates with the politics of resentment, and it is from this position that his transformation and redemption develop.

The references to the 1970s are amplified by elements of the *mise-en-scene*; a *mise-en-scene*, it is suggested, constructed to allude to past, present, and future. The opening sequence has Theo entering a coffee shop, filled with people watching a news item on the murder of Baby Diego, the youngest person on the planet. A gathering audience watches in stunned silence, some silently tearful. Theo moves briskly to the counter to order his coffee. Once served he leaves, and we see him outside adding scotch to his coffee. Suddenly, there is an explosion, as a bomb goes off in the coffee shop. There is rubbish in the streets, and buildings are run-down; the iconic red London buses are grimy. The latter imagery references the 1970s, while the bomb draws correspondences between the IRA bombing campaign of the 1970s and the contemporary bombs of 7/7. The clothing of passers-by, the apparently traditional police helmets, and the presence of familiar high



street chain stores serve to suggest it is now. However, certain aspects of contemporary reality are marked, denoting their narrative significance. Above the high street shops, where upper story windows would be, are giant screens broadcasting continuous, rolling news. An injunction above a building reads 'Crime! Please report suspicious actions'. Theo, who works for the Ministry of Energy, has to prove his identity as he enters the workplace. Posters on the Ministry walls bear slogans such as 'Jobs for the British', 'Report Illegal Workers', 'Working for the British People', and, 'Save Water to Save Lives'. The tone recalls that of World War Two injunctions to the British populace, while the sentiments have contemporary resonance, but again reference 1970s discourses. Readings of familiar signs turn out to be misreadings: the police, after all, are not in traditional helmets, but are wearing beefed - up protective headgear, suitable for riot control. These indices of decay, surveillance and control strike sinister dystopian notes and create a disturbing discord between a sense of recognition and a sense of dislocation. The sense of time slippage both defamiliarises the images and draws attention to their usual naturalisation. Away from the city, the countryside is alight with the burning and charred bodies of cattle and sheep; again a sign referencing familiar imagery from past and contemporary news footage, but made ominous within the film's configuration of signs. References to the English revolution, in the proliferation of religious sects, maintain the sense of temporal dislocation. They suggest that, as in those revolutionary times, there are millenarian style beliefs about the end of humanity, and that, in the transatlantically dispersed phrase which seems to have its origins in that century, the world is turned upside down. A shot of Fleet Street, looking towards St Paul's cathedral, juxtaposes corporate towers, symbols of the power of global capitalism, with numerous street rickshaws; contemporary sign of transient, migrant, labour, making a connection between the two. This image, in which exhaust fumes and the desaturated colour palette lend a smoggy, grey pall, adds to the drab aesthetic of the setting. The effect of the scene is

bleak, as inexorable towers block the light from the workers toiling below, and initially suggests a critical attitude towards colossal corporate power. However, as the narrative develops, it becomes clear that global capitalism is finished. The state now controls every arena.

After the bomb goes off in the cafe, an intertitle appears onscreen to say that the setting is London in 2027, unsettling initial perceptions. The narrative technique of fusing iconography of past, present and future tropes in the *mise-en-scene* constructs a dystopic diegetic future which serves on the one hand to reflect contemporary fears and anxieties, but also to broaden their historical scope. In the film's diegesis Britain is a police state, in which to be foreign *is* to be illegal. Migrants, or 'Foogies', as they are known both colloquially, and pejoratively, are rounded up and placed in camps by agents of the *Department for Homeland Security*. The latter *is* engaged in a draconian policing of UK borders which have been closed for eight years. The text takes the nomenclature, *Department for Homeland Security*, with all its contemporary associations with the 'war on terror', and applies it to the film's border police. The effect of this naming is to conflate 'real' and filmic meanings to make links between an apparent increase in state surveillance and power and a cluster of racialised anxieties about terrorism, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Further scenes draw on familiar imagery to create contemporary resonances and political points. For example, early on in the story, when Theo arrives at a railway station, we see a phalanx of police with shields and batons along the railway platform guarding people in a series of cages. Those in the cages are calling out or crying, while others are in line, being rounded up, with some arguing loudly. An alarm is ringing, and police dogs are barking and snarling at the prisoners, while guards shout aggressively at them. These visual and aural codes create, on the one hand, a mood of turmoil and fear. The camera tracks Theo as he walks on, with a takeaway coffee in hand,

without glancing at the captives, registering his apparent indifference. As the plot develops it becomes apparent that the prisoners are Foogies, being caged for transportation to internment camps. For a moment the shot is focused on an elderly woman, her expression suggesting great distress, talking in German. The scene references the most iconic sign of state terror to remind audiences of the transportation of Jews and others to the Nazi death camps. A later scene, which occurs when Theo, Kee and Miriam have entered Bexhill camp by bus, shows arbitrary punishments being inflicted by guards upon inmates. A series of tableaux, in which inmates are seen being beaten and kicked, or kneeling while at gunpoint, are seen through the windows of the bus. In these images the costumes and postures of the inmates are suggestive of those of detainees in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. The images construct an intertextual relay between the real world imprisonment without trial of those held in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and the Nazi camps, while the 1970s references evoke the Maze prison, suggesting there are equivalences. In this, the film's iconography offers a critical indictment of contemporary transatlanticist geopolitics, by linking the contemporary abuses of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib to the Holocaust and British imperialism, suggesting some equivalences in structures of feeling. This reading is reinforced by the use of the term *Homeland Security*, referencing the real transatlantic alliance in the diegetic context of negative connotations.

Less overtly, but just as damningly, the events which have led to the devastation of 2027 may be read as a direct development from the geopolitics of 2006, the year of the film's production. A group of anti-government activists, the *Fishes*, led by, it transpires, Theo's former partner, Julian (Julianne Moore), abducts Theo in order to persuade him to help them get a young Foogie woman, Kee, to the Human Project, a group of scientists believed by some to be working on resolving the fertility problem. In the *Fishes* hideout,

the walls are papered in old newspapers, revealing amongst other things that Africa has been devastated by nuclear bomb and that Kazakhstan has been annihilated; the influx of migrants to Britain is represented as a direct result of the destruction of their homelands, the reasons for which are not explicitly given. For contemporary audiences, the link between the prevailing Atlanticist, neo-imperialist hegemony and the future catastrophic trajectory is there to be read.

There are, however, also signs that more than a critique of current white Atlanticist policies is at stake, and that the roots of the future dystopic catastrophe predate the Bush-Blair axis. The visual references to the 1970s hint at this, as does a scene which evokes both Orwellian themes and the death throes of the British Empire. Theo, like Winston in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, is woken by the television screen coming to life. The only broadcast institution is the BCC, a scarcely veiled reference to the BBC, its graphics and iconography following the conventions of BBC rolling news. The title sequence of *BCC News* is accompanied by a montage of images of chaos, war and protest from around the world: A shot of the Eiffel Tower has the caption 'Paris'. This is followed by Red Square and 'Moscow'. In Washington there are riots outside the Capitol building and petrol bombs in Kuala Lumpur. Brussels, Hong Kong and Berlin are scenes of firebombing and destruction. In Ankara, Muslims with guns are chanting, and in New York there is a mushroom cloud. Stockholm, Shanghai, and Mexico City appear in rapid succession as the titles and images speed up faster and faster until they cannot be read anymore. The world has collapsed and only Britain soldiers on. The music accompanying a shot of Big Ben and the Palace of Westminster is Elgar's *Nimrod*, with the addition of the chimes of Big Ben. As the montage closes, the text 'Britain Stands Alone' is superimposed over an image of a waving Union flag. The whole effect is to recall very specifically the image of the flag and the playing of the anthem of Oceania in Michael Radford's film version of

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Michael Radford, UK, 1984). The rhetoric is deliberately evocative of newsreel footage of 1940, when Britain 'stood alone' in World War Two. The montage sequence echoes those newsreels in which an image of Britain as a plucky little chancer, facing mighty enemies was preferred to that of an imperial power. The montage is to be understood in ironic terms, its style exposing its rhetorical content. For example, the prominence given to Paris in the opening shot recalls, on the one hand, the signification of Paris, discussed earlier in relation to *The Bourne Identity*, as site of humanist values, and the resonance of the fall of Paris to the Nazis. Its juxtaposition with London and Moscow may be read in terms of the European resistance to fascism, undercutting the rhetoric of Britain standing alone in the context of World War Two. This reading is reinforced by a later shot of Picasso's *Guernica*. However, the shot of Paris further references Cuarón's earlier short film, *Parc Monceau*, a contribution to the ensemble text, *Paris Je T'Aime* (France/Liechtenstein/Switzerland/Germany, 2006). In *Parc Monceau*, initial narrative perceptions are overturned, as things turn out not to be as they first appear. This reference to *Parc Monceau* implies the polysemy of signs in *Children of Men*, and in particular the BCC montage. It suggests that the hegemonic perception of Paris as romantic, and as site of sanctuary, as represented in *The Bourne Identity*, is not the whole story. Paris may, as noted earlier, also be read as a sign of the departure point for the Nazi death camps. The railway station scene of people in cages reinforces this association. If the slogan, 'Britain stands alone', most overtly references the Battle of Britain it is also suggestive of Britain's position after World War Two, when the loss of Empire was concomitant with Britain's displacement by the US as hegemonic power, and before Britain joined the then Common Market of Europe. This reading is supported by the text's visual referencing of the 1970s as site of decay and decline, in contrast to the chauvinistic trumpeting of the BCC footage. The BCC montage exposes the rhetorics of

post-war transatlantic paradigms and reinscribes imperialism and its legacy into the narratives of Paris and Britain.

By encoding his critique of chauvinistic British imperialism and attaching it to Theo via Harry Palmer's anti-Atlanticism, Cuarón creates a position from which to explore and critique its white opposite, white Atlanticism, which Cuarón does via characters and their connection to Theo. Two figures in the text, Julian and Jasper, are made to represent Atlanticist paradigms. Julian is Theo's former partner, a white, American, woman. It is explained that Theo and Julian met 'by chance' among a million protesters, who were there because of their faith, which kept them together. It is not directly revealed what their protest was about, however, an old political slogan, saying 'Don't Attack Iraq!' amongst Jasper's memorabilia offers a clue. Nor is the content of their shared faith revealed. However, the repetition of Judaeo-Christian motifs throughout the film, as will be evidenced shortly, suggests their faith is Christian. The names of Theo and Julian are cases in point. Theo, derived from the Greek for God, is a shortening of Theophilus, meaning lover of God, a meaning which Theo's narrative journey seems to endorse, and which is prefigured in the opening sequence which visually references *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Theophilus is also the figure to whom Luke's gospel is addressed. Julian's name may be a reference to the historical figure, Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century nun and epistolary spreader of the Christian message. This, again, is a role which Julian's character fulfils. However, Theo has lost his faith as a result of the death of his and Julian's son, Dylan, and he and Julian parted. Cuarón is able to construct Theo's and Julian's relationship as a metaphor for the Anglo-American alliance and particularly the so-called special relationship. This is because of prior meanings of the trope of transatlantic romance already established. As discussed in the previous chapter, these meanings are made available by the establishment of the transatlantic romantic-comedy sub-genre and

its allusions to the Blair-Clinton context, as discussed in the previous chapter. The uses of this trope in *Fight Club*, and in *The Bourne Identity*, as discussed in this chapter, further established the transatlantic romance narrative as a metaphor from which to craft new readings of the transatlantic alliance.

The shifts and tensions in the relationship between Theo and Julian allude to shifts and tensions in the transatlantic relationship. As has already been suggested, Cuarón does not offer a straightforward linear correspondence between the film's diegetic narrative and the chronology of the real life context; a formal element which the reader is alerted to by the temporal dislocations of the opening sequence. The story of their past, of anti-war protest and shared faith, combined with visual references to the Pilgrim's progress and the film's Christian iconography all serve to suggest a Christian pacifism as their once shared outlook. The offspring of Theo's and Julian's relationship, Dylan, was a 'beautiful' and 'magical' child, according to Jasper, suggesting that the transatlantic alliance was once a force for good, but their finally barren relationship is suggestive of the ultimate sterility of the transatlantic alliance. In this it may be drawing a distinction between the pre- and post-9/11 white Atlantic paradigms. Theo's anger and resentment directed towards Julian is narratively justified and given vent when he meets her again and charges her with not caring enough about the death of their child. His resentment can be read as referencing the non-diegetic reality of transatlantic politics and giving this narrative a gendered aspect, so merging the politics of resentment with a post-9/11 white, British, masculinist, anti-Atlanticism. The gendered aspect is reinforced by a significant plot change from the novel<sup>211</sup> to the film. In the novel, men are infertile, but in the film this is changed and it is women who are infertile. This change suggests that a reading of gender is salient to the meanings offered by the text. Not least, it allows Theo to fulfil a convention of cinematic

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<sup>211</sup> PD James (1992), *The Children of Men*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf

heroes, that of potency, in all the implications of that word. It reinforces the masculinism of Theo's resentment, and in the configuration of Theo as multivalent sign of British anti-Americanism, is suggestive of Theo as a chauvinistic oppositional counterpoint to the masculinist unilateralism of the Bush persona. That Anglo- American tensions are invoked in a romance that has now ended is suggestive that the old white Atlanticist paradigm is now fractured; and even implicated in the creation of the geo-political crisis alluded to in the film's diegesis. However, as a sign of America, Julian is a contradictory one. On the one hand, she acts unilaterally, and uses kidnap and coercion to achieve her ends. Yet, as the diegesis demonstrably suggests, these ends are good. For example it, is Julian's reappearance in his life which is the catalyst for Theo's narrative journey and ultimate redemption. Julian persuades Theo to use his contacts in the government to get travel documents for Kee to enable her to reach the Human Project. Initially reluctant, Theo accepts the mission, for money, demanding more when it transpires that he must travel with Kee. Unknown to Theo, Kee is pregnant, the first woman to be pregnant in nearly twenty years. This makes her a potential target for capture by the government, and it transpires, rogue *Fishes*. Whilst accompanying Theo, Kee and Miriam, Kee's midwife, to a safe house, Julian is assassinated in an attack orchestrated by another member of *The Fishes*, Luke, who is black, and British. Luke then takes over the leadership. There is a turning point for Theo when he discovers that Kee is pregnant, and she tells him that Julian had told her to put her trust in him. Theo's attitude is transformed, and he becomes determined to protect Kee and her child. That Julian is the impetus for Theo's reinvention mirrors the narrative roles of the female characters in *Fight Club* and *Children of Men*, and undermines any potential reading of Julian as standing only for an uncomplicated anti-Americanism in the post-9/11 context of the Bush administration. The diegetic media misrepresentation of her as responsible for an act of terrorism points to an inference that her actions are misunderstood. Her betrayal, and death, at the hands of characters we



are positioned to despise, evokes some sympathy. Julian's contradictions speak to the extra-textual ambivalence of Britain's attitude to the Anglo-American alliance in wake of 9/11 and the developing divisions over a myriad of concerns, already mentioned, including the premises for war in Iraq, increased surveillance and securitisation in Britain and the US, and the ongoing experience of citizenship as less than secure. Theo's reluctant compliance with Julian's mission is the narrative expression of this ambivalence. Julian's death suggests, as does her infertility, the ending of a version of the white Atlantic. Furthermore, it narratively paves the way for a version of Atlanticist renewal. It will be argued that this is achieved in the figure of Kee, the 'key' to the future. The symbolic significance of Kee will be discussed shortly. However, in order to contextualise that discussion. The next sections will consider the ways in which the text enlarges the ethnic scope of Atlanticist paradigms, a diegetic context within which Kee's renewed version may be understood.

Cuarón's critique of hegemonic white Atlanticism is most clearly developed in a scene when Theo visits his cousin, Nigel (Danny Huston), a member of the government, whom Theo must ask for the travel permits. Nigel's upper middle-class, white persona is represented by the iconography of his home, a white cube, minimalist, apartment, in a gated fortress, the entrance to which is portrayed for the diegesis by the real Tate Modern. He has in his possession iconic works of European art which he has 'saved', including Las *Meninas*, several Goyas and Michaelangelo's *David*. *Guernica* hangs on his dining room wall. His home is a sterile white gallery, an inference reinforced by the use of Tate Modern, and the presence of his son, apparently lifeless, animated only by electrical impulses and medication. The iconography of the white cube gallery is a transatlantic one, recalling the gallery scenes of Allen's 1970s romances. As a visual metaphor, like the infertility plot premise, the space itself may be read as alluding to the sterility of white

Atlanticist culture. Nigel and Theo enjoy fine dining, produced by Nigel's servants, while listening to Purcell. Theo questions the point of saving these pieces, given that in a hundred years there will be no-one to see them. Nigel replies, 'You know Theo, I just don't think about it'. However, the white Atlantic represented here is not empty of content as the scene as a whole constructs a representation of a political elite obsessed with trappings of wealth and 'taste', concerned only with its own survival and feudal in its exercise of power. It may seem that Nigel has missed the message of *Guernica*; in insulating himself from the problems outside his gates he has created an asylum for himself, while sanctioning a system which denies asylum to others; nor does he think this is a problem. However, rather than missing the point of *Guernica*, it may be that Nigel understands it very well, and this is why it and the other pieces must be locked away; clearly not for posterity, but in order that mass access to it be denied. The irony of art having lost its monetary value, now that there is no future, is that its political meanings are recuperated. In selecting *Guernica*, *Las Meninas* and works by Goya, Cuarón's suggestion seems to be that the purpose of art is to hold up a mirror to society, and therein lies its potential danger for elites.

Jasper's role in the narrative is one of moral compass. His persona and politics are of a leftist political sensibility. His backstory reveals he opposed the Iraq war and the state's treatment of migrants, in a further example of the text blurring the boundaries between the diegetic and the non-diegetic. His politics and that of a changing Britain are revealed via a collage of cuttings, slogans and images from his life and that of his wife. Old headlines which reflect his political concerns proclaim 'Political Cartoonist of the Year', 'All Foreigners are Illegal', 'Channel Tunnel Closes', 'Infertility at 25%' and 'MI5 Deny Involvement in Torture of Photojournalist'; while his own views are revealed via a badge declaring 'I Love Foogies', and posters instructing, 'Don't Attack Iraq!', and 'Not in My

Name'. Jasper takes loving care of his now catatonic wife, and he is made to stand for ideals of lost humanity of which he now seems to be the sole bearer. 'Poor Foogies', he says, 'After escaping the worst atrocities and finally making it to England our government hunts them down like cockroaches'. His 'peace and love' political philosophy is represented as opposed to that of the *Fishes*. They kill him, literally, in the narrative; and figuratively, the suggestion is that the Left's move to collective militancy has destroyed the potential for individual enlightenment. Jasper is the only human connection for Theo, and his goodness positions the audience to sympathise with his politics, and by association, with Theo. He is coded as hybrid; his identity as syncretic. His persona references an elderly John Lennon via his hair, beard and glasses, and he is given to playing versions of 60s classics like 'Ruby Tuesday'. He cooks, and is seen wearing an apron. His use of 'ganga' implies a 1970s post-hippie lifestyle influenced by Rastafarianism. He is coded as offering an alternative, feminised, version of 60s and 70s masculinity to those of the Theo/Palmer construction. His politics and persona reference a late twentieth century transatlantic leftist political culture, one which has its roots in the Black Atlantic and Eastern mysticism. Jasper's home contains a display of transatlanticist memorabilia; a display which is given a cultural significance earlier denied to that of Theo's work colleague. It is suggested that Jasper has saved and memorialised this cultural store in order to pass it on. When he dies, it is partly because this work is done. He has ensured Theo will be able to get Kee away from the Fishes, and he has nurtured Theo back to faith. In this reading, Cuarón's construction of a potentially Good Atlantic is a hybrid one. However, the nature of film, as discussed in the methodology to this project, is such that racialised identities appear as self-evident, and so Jasper's persona is most likely to be read as white, rather than hybrid. Cuarón gets around this problem by finding ways to enlarge the ethnic scope of his Atlanticism.

Cuaron's use of Christian iconography throughout invites a reading of the text via religious understandings, and is suggestive of its construction of a Christian Atlantic. However, the theme of Christianity is frequently problematised and undercut. For example, in the opening sequence, the bleak *mise-en-scene* of Fleet Street is lightened by the image of St. Paul's on the horizon. Like Celestial City in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it is outside the City of Destruction, not beyond reach, but faint. This image, read in the context of the film's economy of signs, prefigures Theo's journey to redemption. However, in many instances the use of Christian symbolism seems to be in order to show how the message of Christianity has become distorted in this dystopia. For example, the theme of Christian radicalism is alluded to in the name of Julian's underground group, *The Fishes*, which references the symbol of the early Christian church, still used by Christians today. *The Fishes*, after Julian's death, become Theo's enemies and are ruthless in their methods and their desire to control Kee and her child. In a scene at the safe house, members of *The Fishes* argue about strategy. Their dialogue is constructed to be reminiscent of the often portrayed in-fighting of Marxist and feminist political movements. Unconcerned for Kee's welfare, they are shown as immersed, still, in old divisions. Most damningly, they put political ends before the needs of an individual. This scene, in the context of the film's economy of signs, rejects both Marxist and feminist political solutions as offering only hopelessness and mistrust; and by inference a Christian militancy radicalised by Marxism and feminism.

Rather, the text endorses the idea of faith as going beyond Christianity. This is suggested not only by Jasper's positioning as the film's moral centre, but also by the quoting of the text 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih' at the film's closure. The phrase, the final line of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, means peace in Hindi, and affirms Jasper's philosophy as the

film's moral philosophy. It refers the audience to the themes of that poem: despair, sterility and the search for spiritual renewal of the post-Great War generation, and so connecting them to contemporary culture. It also suggests that like that poem, the film is rich in symbolism which requires some decoding. It may also suggest an affinity with Eliot's sensibility, not least his transatlanticism. While the allusion to Eliot reinforces an argument that the film constructs an allegorical Christian message, a theme for which there is considerable, other, textual evidence, it nevertheless once more affirms the broadening of the film's ethnic scope, and the revitalisation of faith in Britain via migration from the former British Empire. So rather than offering a straightforward Christian allegory, the text is eclectic in its allusions to faith. Nevertheless, images and events throughout the film draw on Christian mythology, but not in a direct Christian allegory. Again, at the safe house, Theo's moment of conversion to his mission occurs when Kee undresses to show him that she is pregnant. The scene takes place in a cattle shed, and Kee stands naked, with the animals behind her, as Theo looks on amazed. 'It's a miracle!' he exclaims. Tavener's music, *Fragments of a Prayer*, which accompanies Kee's revelation, adds a further layer of Christian symbolism, and this musical motif returns at moments of religious revelation or significance. The cattle shed scene overtly references the Christian birth stories, with Kee suggesting the Black Madonna, and her unborn child as the saviour of the world. However, Kee later declares, 'I am not a Virgin'. This claim is suggestive of an undermining of Christian fundamentalist or literal readings of the Bible, and so offers an interpretive coding. The name of Theo and Julian's child Dylan, offers rich polysemic meanings: It recalls Dylan Thomas, an iconoclastic Christian; furthermore, it resonates with 1960s protest and iconoclasm, in the earlier Bob Dylan, while also referencing the later Bob Dylan, a Christian convert, thus enlarging the Christian Atlantic via both of these transatlantic Dylans. These potential meanings attached to the name become significant at the end of the film when Kee chooses to name her child Dylan, a point which will be

returned to shortly. However, before that discussion, it is important to consider the film's treatment of race and gender which remain troubling, and may be viewed as undermining its critique of imperialist and supremacist Atlanticist positions.

The invention, for the film, of Kee as the bearer of the future may be read in several ways, one of which is that she represents the decentring of imperialist whiteness as the default Atlanticist identity, and it will be suggested that this is the text's preferred reading. As she is the only character to survive to escape to the New World, her significance may be read as meaning that the old hierarchies of identity are finished. Her character supports a rhetoric of newness and reinvention; that the New World will not be white is a sign that whiteness will no longer be the default transatlantic identity. However, in order for the text to create these meanings the construction of her persona and narrative journey bear the traces of racialised and gendered tropes of blackness. As a character, she is not given history or context. The narrative justification for her apparent lack of knowledge or cultural capital may be that her lack of these things is a product of the circumstances in which she finds herself. The only characters who are contextualised and given a cultural heritage are Theo and Jasper. Her limited cultural knowledge is signified by her choosing of unsuitable names, according to Theo, for her unborn child. It is only at the end, when she has spent time with Jasper and Theo, and their history and culture have been passed on to her that she makes the 'right' choice, signifying that she has now achieved understanding and is fit to bear the new generation. Theo's role as the white saviour who brings this about alludes once more to narratives of slavery, with Theo as Moses, bringing Kee out of bondage to the Promised Land. Like Moses, Theo will not live to see the Promised Land himself. Kee's journey, led by Theo/Moses, and its conflation with the biblical exodus of Hebrew slaves with transatlantic slavery serves to erase the historical reality of the transatlantic slave trade and re-present her crossing as a flight to freedom from persecution. Critics

have commented on how refreshing it is to have a film in which there is no sexual relationship for the hero. It would certainly have been possible for Cuarón to construct a romance between Kee and Theo, in which they might even go into the future together, without altering the narrative structure of the film too much. However, the text is at pains to militate against the possibility of miscegenation and constructs alibis against it. For example, Jasper suggests that Dylan would have been about Kee's age had he lived, thereby promoting a paternalist relationship between them. Kee's childlike ignorance also makes her a less convincing partner for the knowing Theo. Thus a further alibi, her youth, is given to account for her ignorance. However, it is difficult to escape a sense that she is presented in terms of older tropes of blackness as childlike, while at the same time, sexualised; 'I am not a Virgin', she jokes. She is represented as a vessel for Theo to demonstrate his regained faith by saving her and, by inference, the world. She becomes in effect his burden, with all the imperialist resonances implied in that word. In delivering her child, he literally and figuratively takes control of her body. When it seems she has fallen into Luke's hands, she is vulnerable, because Luke, a black man, cannot be trusted to take care of the black woman and child. In *Children of Men*, only the white hero will do this, and it is important that he retains his symbolic potency for these meanings to be made, hence a further justification for the plot change from the novel to film, in which women become the infertile group.

However, in an alternative reading, Theo's genealogical descent from the white masculinist heroes of earlier genres, and his construction in *Children of Men* as potent, white saviour serves to make more meaningful his death, symbolising the death of hegemonic, masculine whiteness. Kee's lack of guile and history may be read as essential qualities in symbolising the transcendence of old, discredited Atlanticist paradigms. For example, Kee's journey mirrors that of the transatlantic slave journey and the Golden

Triangle, from Africa, to Britain and then on to the New World. However, *Children of Men* now seems to invert and erase the meanings of the historical journey as she is now, it seems, heading to freedom in an elective migration. However, in the context of Cuarón's critique of old transatlantic paradigms, this narrative ending suggests the need to escape the constraints of history, only possible if the old political rhetorics and racial privileges are abandoned.

As suggested, the film offers a post-9/11 critique of contemporary Atlanticist discourses. The dystopian future setting, which nonetheless is recognisable as contemporary, offers critiques of both hegemonic white Atlanticism and of chauvinistic anti-Atlanticism. The text taps into a number of contemporary transatlantic narratives and anxieties, such as a post-9/11 mistrust of the Atlantic alliance. Images which invoke Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and the treatment of asylum seekers, are metonymically associated with concentration camps. The construction of Jasper, and his message of peace, as the film's moral compass, in contrast with the representations of those who use violence, such as Julian and Luke, makes this a text critical of recent geo-politics, largely driven by the white Atlanticist hegemony. In its representations of foreigners and their treatment by the security forces the text is critical of transatlantic racialised and paranoid sensibilities, such as narratives of white resentment and victimisation. The collective political movements of the left, Marxism and feminism are discredited as lacking either vision or humanity. However, a number of narrative and symbolic elements suggest not an abandonment of Atlanticism, but that a renewed version is desired. The Judaeo-Christian allegorical imagery of the Holy Family and Moses and the exodus from bondage serve to suggest there is a promised land: a New World. Julian, an American, points the way there, while Jasper, a syncretic transatlantic construction, makes the journey possible. Kee's origins in Africa, and the impossibility of her return there, echo, while simultaneously erasing, the Atlantic crossings



of African slaves. These narrative elements, including the references to seventeenth century religious movements and their associations suggest that the Promised Land is America. The film's ending suggests that it will be an African woman who will be the progenitor of the future. She confers on the baby the syncretic heritage passed down by Jasper: 'I'm going to name the baby Dylan', she declares at the end. It may be argued, as suggested here, that as she has been separated from her past and remade in the cultural image of Jasper, the text confirms the future as hegemonically white Atlanticist. Yet the death of Theo would seem to confirm, visibly, the death of hegemonic whiteness. Furthermore, the text fuses black (Kee) and syncretic white (Jasper) Atlantics, in the visible, self-evidently racialised, sign of Kee. The deaths of Julian, Jasper and finally, Theo, confirm the death of three old, transatlantic paradigms and the text's vision of syncretic Atlanticist renewal in the figure of Kee.

This chapter has argued that post 9/11, the white Atlanticist paradigm narrated in the 90s Rom-Com genre became untenable post 9/11, as the Atlantic alliance, including the so-called Special Relationship, came under pressure. It has further been argued that the narrative of white masculine crisis has become a trope for the cultural rearticulation of Atlanticisms. The chapter examined the content of these rearticulations in *The Bourne Identity* (2002) and *Children of Men* (2006). It was also suggested that there were continuities of these themes between *Fight Club* (1999), and the later films. The discussion explored the ways in which the white Atlantic is interrogated in all three films via intertextual references to discourses of white masculine anxiety and resentment. In each case, hegemonic white Atlanticism is associated with white imperialism and tropes of white masculine resentment, and in each case a new counter-hegemonic discourse is offered for a re-imagination of masculinity and transnational paradigms. Though the version of white Atlanticism articulated in the 90s Rom-Coms is understood as no longer tenable,

nevertheless, in each case, the renewal of transatlanticism is dependent on an intertextual relay of the transatlantic romance narrative established in those films. In *Fight Club*, this narrative is deployed in the construction of its counter-hegemonic white Atlantic. In *The Bourne Identity*, the ethnic scope of the white Atlantic is enlarged via the romance narrative, and in *Children of Men*, its demise connotes the death of whiteness and the articulation of a hoped for syncretic Atlantic.

## Conclusion

The preceding discussion has interrogated the politics of polyvalent Atlantics via the heuristic device of the 'white Atlantic', in the context of the progressive decentring of whiteness. Woody Allen's construction of a counter-hegemonic Jewish Atlanticist discourse is in opposition to an implied other, the hegemonic, imperialist, white Atlantic. The discussion of Allen's 1970s romances interrogated his critique of white Atlanticism and examined the content of his Jewish Atlantic. This construct offers a critique of extreme and ordinary whiteness, but one appears to undercut by his privileging of white femininity via his reliance on conventional cinematic technical conventions. Blackness in particular remains a surrogate identity, not speaking on its own behalf. His efforts to avoid privileging Jewish identity appear similarly inevitably undermined by his deployment of the romantic comedy genre, which construct him as the default identity. However, the romance of whiteness is refused, as the conventional satisfactions of the genre are thwarted, a key element in Allen's critique of the hegemonic white Atlanticist paradigm. In this critique Allen deconstructs the naturalisation of white Atlanticist discourse and constructs an alternative transatlantic paradigm.

It has been argued that the emergence of the transatlantic romantic-comedy sub-genre, ironically, while developing genealogically from the Woody Allen romances of the 1970s, constituted the mobilisation of a white Atlanticist discursive paradigm. The preceding discussion suggests that a new sub-genre, the transatlantic romantic comedy, emerged in the 1990s, coalescing with the incipient Blair-Clinton alliance. Initially, its available polysemic racialised and gay narratives are suggestive of, on the one hand a liberal, democratic, human rights based mindset, which attempts to enlarge the scope of hegemonic, heterosexual, white masculinity, but which nevertheless, finally privileges

white masculinity as the default white Atlanticist identity. This discursive inflection is not developed further in the genre as it becomes a celebration of rather than a critique of whiteness. Nevertheless, the genre texts successively display an increasing sense of Atlanticist tension in the wake of the election of Bush and overt unilateralism. The discussion suggests that the establishment of the white Atlantic romance made it an available trope for the construction of counter-hegemonic Atlantics, post-9/11, even as its version became untenable, as suggested by the narrative reshaping of the genre in *Love Actually*, and as the Atlantic alliance, including the so-called Special Relationship, came under pressure.

The availability of the white Atlantic romance as a trope for the construction of counter-hegemonic Atlantics, post-9/11 is evident in the case studies of *Fight Club* (1999), *The Bourne Identity* (2002) and *Children of Men* (2006). In these films the romance narrative is interwoven with discourses of white masculine crisis in re-narrativisations of white Atlanticisms. In *Fight Club*, a new white Atlantic vision is offered, one which is, on the one hand, suggestive of a whiteness without privilege, but on the other remains within a discourse of romanticising whiteness. *The Bourne Identity* enlarges the ethnic scope of its preferred Atlantic paradigm, suggesting, on the one hand, perhaps the end of white Atlanticism. However, the text resecures the white hero as the default identity, and uses the trope of Africanism to suggest his renewal as the 'new white man'. In this, *The Bourne Identity* repositions the White Atlantic paradigm, and in the process stabilises it. In *Children of Men* the ethnic enlargement of its Atlantic paradigm is taken further and the death of whiteness is linked to the construction of a hybridised Atlantic. In this way, these texts acknowledge the history of white supremacy, and via the construction of a neo-liberal, self-reflexive, now racialised, white masculine subject, enact a distancing from that history by staging a refusal of its privileges. However, at the same time, in the context of

the global decentring of whiteness, in constructing the white masculine hero, now as a neo-liberal and self-reflexive identity, they are suggestive of the reinvention of white Atlanticisms in the discursive production of recentred and resecured whiteness. Only in *Children of Men* and in the earlier Allen films is the hegemonic white Atlanticist paradigm destabilised and decentred.

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## Filmography

*28 Days Later*, Danny Boyle, UK, 2002

*A Matter of Life and Death*, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1946

*A Scanner Darkly*, (Richard Linklater, US, 2006)

*A Time to Kill*, Joel Schumacher, US, 1996

*An American in Paris*, Vincente Minelli, US, 1951

*American Beauty*, Sam Mendes, US, 1999

*Across the Pacific*, John Huston, US, 1942

*Annie Hall*, Woody Allen, US, 1977

*The Apartment*, Billy Wilder, US, 1960

*The Bank Job*, Roger Donaldson, UK, 2008

*The Birth of a Nation*, DW Griffith, US, 1915

*The Bourne Identity*, Doug Liman, US/Germany/Czech Republic, 2002

*Bridget Jones's Diary*, Sharon Maguire, UK, 2001

*Captain Blood*, Michael Curtiz, US, 1935

*Casablanca*, Michael Curtiz, US, 1942

*Children of Men*, Alfonso Cuarón, US/UK, 2006

*Croupier*, Mike Hodges, UK, 1998

*Disclosure*, Barry Levinson, US, 1994

*Distant Voices, Still Lives*, Terence Davies, UK, 1988

*Double Indemnity*, Billy Wilder, US, 1944

*Equilibrium*, Kurt Wimmer, US, 2002

*Falling Down*, Joel Schumacher, US/UK/France, 1993

*Fight Club*, David Fincher, US/Germany, 1999

*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Mike Newell, UK, 1994

*Get Carter*, Mike Hodges, UK, 1971

*Gigi*, Vincente Minelli, US, 1958

*Henry V*, Laurence Olivier, UK, 1944

*In the Heat of the Night*, Norman Jewison, US, 1967

*The Ipcress File*, Sidney J. Furie, UK, 1965

*The Island*, Michael Bay, US, 2005

*Last Action Hero*, John McTiernan, US, 1993

*The Life of Emile Zola*, William Dieterle, US, 1937

*Love Actually*, Richard Curtis, UK, 2003

*The Maltese Falcon*, John Huston, US, 1941

*Manhattan*, Woody Allen, US, 1979

*Maurice*, James Ivory, UK, 1987

*Minority Report*, Steven Spielberg, US, 2002

*My Beautiful Laundrette*, Stephen Frears, UK, 1985

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Michael Radford, UK, 1984

*Notting Hill*, Roger Michell, UK, 1999

*Paths of Glory*, Stanley Kubrick, US, 1957

*Play It Again Sam*, Woody Allen, US, 1972

*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, Tay Garnett, US, 1946

*Quantum of Solace*, Marc Forster, UK/US, 2008

*The Quiet American*, Philip Noyce, Germany/US/UK/Australia/France, 2002

*Robin Hood*, Michael Curtiz, US, 1938

*Sense and Sensibility*, Ang Lee, UK/US, 1995

*Shakespeare in Love*, John Madden, UK, 1998

*Some Like It Hot*, Billy Wilder, US, 1959

*Spartacus*, Stanley Kubrick, US, 1960

*Suture*, Scott McGehee, UK, 1993

*Top Hat*, Mark Sandrich, US, 1935

*The Transporter*, Louis Leterrier/Corey Yuen, France/US, 2002

*The Vikings*, Richard Fleischer, US, 1958